

The Hudson Review

Winter 1997

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Louis Simpson
Soldier's Heart—a memoir

Jean Starobinski
Water-Wheels

George Watson
I Was Kingsley Amis

Joan Wickersham
In the Heart—a story

Harold Fromm
My Science Wars

POEMS BY Robert McDowell, Daniel Mark Epstein,
Tom Wayman, Joan Murray, Sydney Lea

HISTORIC THEATRES BY Richard Hornby

REVIEWS BY Bruce Bawer, Gary Krist, Tess Lewis,
Clara Claiborne Park, Robert Phillips, James Seaton



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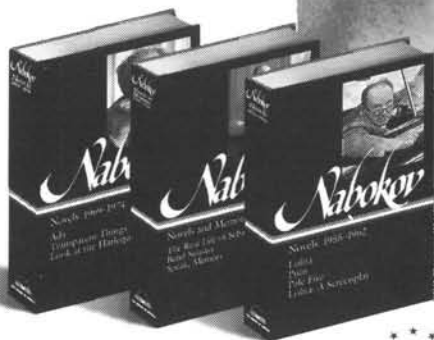
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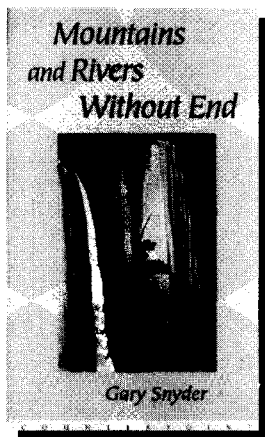
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TO OUR READERS

A new book by a Contributing Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, it will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

RICHARD HORNBY: *Mad About Theatre*. Applause Theatre & Cinema Books. \$19.95p.

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Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editors.

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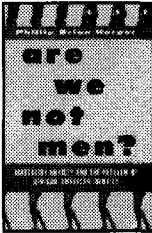


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A Life of Virginia Woolf
Panthea Reid

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Criticism



ARE WE NOT MEN?

Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity
Phillip Brian Harper

"A thoughtful and provocative meditation on the complex status of the African-American male in American society"—Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Phillip Brian Harper has an elegant sense of irony, a keen eye for contradiction, and a serious message to convey. These essays on masculinity, race, and homophobia are meticulous, witty, thoughtful, sobering, and absorbing. This is cultural criticism at its best"—Patricia J. Williams. \$30.00, 272 pp.



LIGHTING OUT FOR THE TERRITORY

Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture
Shelley Fisher Fishkin

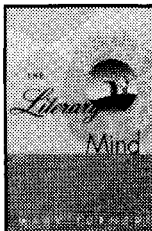
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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

Joseph Epstein's essay on Robert Lowell ("Mistah Lowell—He Dead"), in the Summer 1996 issue, makes the case that Lowell's extraordinary reputation during his lifetime had much to do with two central aspects of the life: that his name was Robert Lowell (rather than, as Mr. Epstein wittily says, Jim Swenson), and that for extended periods he was mad. One can agree that both the venerable lineage and the volatile psyche were provocations for both individual readers and cultural institutions to glamorize and advertise Lowell.

But doesn't the "substantial body of poems" Mr. Epstein refers to constitute an invaluable and significant achievement in modern American poetry? Have I, like others who have admired, loved, and memorized a number of those poems, been sold a bill of goods? Mr. Epstein seems mainly unmoved by Lowell's poetry: he has a good word only for the final volume, *Day by Day*, although he admits that *Life Studies* contains a few (only a few) "memorable phrasings." He also claims that—unlike D.H. Lawrence, who was a prey to "wretched ideas"—Lowell "had no ideas whatsoever." This seems to me wrong, at least with reference to Lowell's first book, *Lord Weary's Castle*, which is filled with too many ideas, convictions, and obsessions about American history, capitalism, the Puritan heritage, Catholicism vs. Protestantism. It was surely good that Lowell largely got free of those ideas in what I take to be his two best books, *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead*.

Mr. Epstein is hard on *Life Studies*, calling it one of those books that shouldn't be read a second time. As one who has read it countless times, how to account for its fascination? Part of it must have to do with memorable phrasings: Mr. Epstein produces a couple of them, one of which (from "For George Santayana"), misquoted by him, should read "There is no God and Mary is His Mother." But aren't there many more? Three examples: from the Ford Madox Ford poem. "The lobbed ball plops, then dribbles to the cup. . . . (a birdie Fordie!)" ; from "Home After Three Months Away," lines addressed to his little daughter who is watching him shave, "Dearest, I cannot loiter here / in lather like a polar bear"; from "Skunk Hour," the apostrophe to the "fairy decorator"—"There is no money in his work, / he'd rather marry." In fact *Life Studies* is full of jokes, wordplay, and sad comedy: the lines Mr. Epstein quotes as examples of "cliché abstraction"—"These are the tranquillized *Fifties*, / and I am forty," and the "Freudian papa" from "During Fever"—seem to me rather on the witty side. And a melodramatic declaration of madness ("My Mind's not right") in "Skunk Hour" is humorously



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balanced both by the early fairy decorator and the splendid skunks that conclude the poem.

In other words, *Life Studies* appears to me to have a lot of life in it, as well as a lot of art: its free verse isn't all that free—rhyme and pentameter appear and vanish in interesting ways. As for "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereaux Winslow," Mr. Epstein says rightly that it would scarcely "give quite the same ping" if it were titled "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Manny Klein." But the poem gives more than a ping in its wonderful blend of the humorous and the serious, as in these lines about Uncle Devereaux: "He was animated, hierarchical, / like a ginger snap man in a clothes-press. / He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin's disease." Here and elsewhere in *Life Studies* there is plenty of the "originality," even some of the "joyousness" Mr. Epstein says Lowell's poetry lacks. As for *For the Union Dead*, which Mr. Epstein passes over too quickly, shouldn't at least a word of praise be given the title poem? (I would want similarly to praise at least seven or eight others in the book.)

So even while agreeing with Mr. Epstein that the later sonnets are often arbitrary, obscure, and dashed-off, I'd credit Lowell's "substantial body of poems" with a lot more substance than Mr. Epstein does. Lowell's friend, Randall Jarrell, once wrote about Wallace Stevens that "A good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or so times and he is great." I think Lowell was one of those poets so struck.

Amherst, Massachusetts

William H. Pritchard

Joseph Epstein replies:

William Pritchard misreads me when he says that I think one of the reasons for Robert Lowell's fame was his madness. I don't believe I ever said or even suggested any such thing. Nor, as Mr. Pritchard implies, do I wish Robert Lowell to have written poems with more ideas. Such ideas as he did have all seem to have been in the category known as received opinions—especially received political opinions—and the world doesn't need more of those, particularly from poets.

My chief points in my essay are that few of Lowell's poems ring, sing, or go ping in the night—at least not for me as they apparently do for Mr. Pritchard—and that Lowell's reputation is really quite astonishing in the light of his actual accomplishment. That reputation, as I hope my essay makes plain, has more to do with the history of snobbery and of publicity than of poetry.

Finally, Mr. Pritchard and I disagree about the number of splendid poems that Robert Lowell wrote. Mr. Pritchard is a critic I admire, not least for his generous sense of appreciation, but I suspect that he overstates the case for Lowell's poetry in his letter. Only time, of course, will referee this dispute between us.

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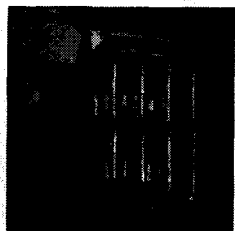


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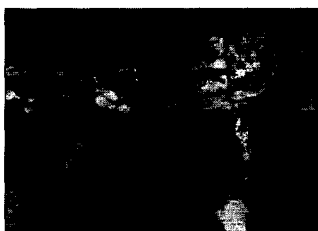
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Soldier's Heart

It begins in France in June of '44. Men are lying face down on the earth. The air is filled with sounds, shrieks that come out of the sky and terminate with an explosion. This may be a matter of seconds. If the sounds continue, the men will be seen scraping the surface of the earth with shovels and burying themselves in it until, like a species of animal, they vanish from sight. A head emerges now and looks around cautiously before disappearing again.

Or the men are walking up a road in two parallel lines, with an interval between every man and the one in front of him and the one behind. They are heavily burdened, with a pack on their back, and they are carrying rifles, machine guns, and mortars. If the shrieking from the sky begins they will turn quickly out of the road and lie face down. Or they have spread out and are walking in an open field. An embankment runs across it . . . the railroad. There is a brief purring sound, then a rhythmic drumming. If you should happen to be with these men it would sound as though the air were being torn. One of them falls. The others run forward and crouch in the shelter of the embankment.

Such is the life or death of an infantry soldier in France in the summer of 1944. These actions will be repeated many times . . . the scenery will change, from small fields separated by hedgerows to a flat landscape with windmills, to a forest covered with snow. The soldiers will pass through villages. Now they are on the banks of a river, and rowing across in rubber boats. Finally they are among mountains.

I was discharged from the U.S. Army in 1945 and went home. I returned to the University. I have a vague recollection of sitting with other students in a room—only a few around a long table. Some great book was being discussed . . . it was the course for upper-division students known as the Colloquium. I was reading furiously about . . . everything. When I was not reading I was

writing stories, essays, poems. From what I have been told I would hardly stop to eat. The man with whom I shared an apartment on Morningside Heights told me that he would be making dinner, and would ask me if I wanted some, and I'd say no.

I had some success with all this typing—a short story was published in *Esquire*. I cannot bear to think of it—I do not recognize the young man who wrote it. It must have been the manic humor with which this tale about a man who ran a beauty salon was told that appealed to the editors.

What followed I do not know. One person had it that I lost my key to the apartment I was sharing, and was found lying unconscious outside the door. A friend would inform me in a letter that I had been wandering in the streets, and picked up by the police, and that I resisted violently. Both versions cannot be true—or were they referring to different episodes? Perhaps each of my informants brought to my “breakdown,” as such things were called, his own idea of my character.

Shadows were moving around me. The blind man in the Bible said, “I see men as trees walking.” So did I. The darkness cleared, and I was in a large room with barred windows, and saw men as they were.

I was in a hospital ward. It wasn't an army hospital, but Kings Park on Long Island. Why wasn't I in a veterans' hospital? I suppose that after the war they were too crowded, and the rest had to be put in other places. Or perhaps the members of my family did not know that there were such things as hospitals for veterans. The war had passed them by. My father died when I was a boy, and my mother was traveling in Latin America. She sold cosmetics and advised women how to make themselves beautiful—like the owner of the beauty salon in my story. The only other relatives I had were some aunts and an uncle. They did as they were told, signed the necessary papers, and I was sent to Kings Park.

What name have they given it now . . . the illness I had as a result of being shot at and shelled for months on end? I don't suppose many of our soldiers in the Gulf War have suffered from it . . . they were spared a long engagement. After Vietnam it was called “post-traumatic stress disorder.” In World War II it was called “combat fatigue.” In the Great War (I prefer that name, for the Great War was what people at the time thought it was) it

was called “shell shock.” In the Civil War it was “soldier’s heart.” This name strikes me as the best, for it describes an illness that involved my heart as much as my head. My heart would beat faster, I would tremble and sweat, and, on occasion, pass out.

The patients in Kings Park Hospital saw very little of the doctors. There was one who came into the ward now and then, but I don’t recall any conversation I had with him. None, surely, that lasted more than a minute. There were two women—one was a nurse, the other seemed to have had some training in psychology. Their main duty was to see that the patients were quiet or harmlessly busy playing cards or board games or reading a magazine. The female psychologist was intelligent and kind. There were also three guards. They were the ones who kept order. Much of the time, especially during the evening and night hours, they ran the ward.

Two of the guards were the kind Chekhov describes in “Ward No. 6.” One was a scrawny man with a vacuous face. He showed me his right hand—the trigger finger was missing. He waggled the stump under my face with a sly smile. This, he gave me to understand, was why he had been excused from military service. The other guard was an older man, stocky and muscular, with a bullet head. He was dangerous—he liked to beat up the patients. He informed me that he was the one who had knocked out my front teeth when I was first brought to the ward. He seemed to think it was a joke I would like to share. The third guard was a black man.

One of the patients was a young black man—I don’t think he was more than eighteen or nineteen years old. There may have been other black patients in the ward, but I don’t remember any. This one, however, I remember very well. He came towards me one day carrying a newspaper. “You can read it,” he said. “Read it for me.” The stocky, bullet-headed guard was standing nearby. The young man turned toward him and hit him lightly on the chest. It wasn’t a blow . . . scarcely more than a tap. The guard knocked him down. The other guard, the one with the missing trigger finger, came over, and the two of them stood over the boy and kicked him repeatedly in his sides and belly.

The next day the black guard told me that the young man had died. He asked me if I had seen what happened. I said I had—it was right in front of me. “Will you testify?” he asked. I said that

I would. That evening the guard who had knocked the boy down and kicked him to death spoke to me. If there was an enquiry, and if I was called as a witness, and if I said anything about what happened, I would never leave the hospital.

I was not called, and I did not bear witness. If I had I would surely have been killed, or these murderers would have seen to it that I spent the rest of my life in a hospital ward. Such was the treatment of patients at Kings Park Hospital in 1946. I have no doubt that such incidents are still occurring in hospitals, though not as frequently as they did at that time. I can imagine what being in prison must be like.

I received shock treatments, and later I was assigned to help the doctor, lifting each patient onto the table. I watched as the current passed through and the body convulsed. There has been much controversy over shock treatments—whether or not they did irremediable harm. Speaking only for myself, I think they brought me out of the fog in which I had been walking. They may also have destroyed areas of memory. It took me some years to remember episodes of my early life, and I have never been able to recall the months leading to my collapse.

The war itself I have recovered in bright patches. The areas immediately surrounding these remain dark. Perhaps they would have been so in any case—life in barracks and between battles can be dreary. In fact, by writing about the war I may have recalled it more clearly than most of my fellow soldiers. Writers are different—they don't forget.

One of the symptoms of my illness had been hearing voices. But one day—and this was after I came out of the fog and was quite calm and rational—looking out of the cage, the barred windows behind which we lived, at grass and trees and clouds, I heard a voice say, "Praise God, they resist, they resist!" I could say, I *thought* I heard a voice, but am not willing to hand over the victory to those who believe that they know what is real and what is not. Most doctors are of this mind. It is a rare psychoanalyst who, like Freud and Jung, reads works of imagination. They don't take such things seriously—they cannot afford to take them seriously—it would be disastrous in the line of work they have chosen.

Who was it who was resisting? Others like myself I suppose. I believe with Shakespeare and Blake and Rimbaud that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the

philosophy of those who serve the world, and who administer its institutions, and, by a fortunate concatenation, grow rich.

Being pronounced whole, more or less, and discharged from Kings Park, but with instructions to report to a government-appointed doctor at regular times, is not the end of this history. The more evident symptoms of my illness would disappear so that I was thought of by most people as a reasonable and level-headed man. But the cure would take time.

For some years after leaving the hospital I was subject to the sudden onsets I have mentioned: a heart that beat faster, and shaking, and sweating. I would imagine shells falling and hear the sound of guns. I could not stand being confined. I went to the theater to see the first run of *I Am a Camera*, and had to walk out during the first act, to breathe the air of Broadway. I was having dinner in a restaurant with a woman who supported the arts. I began eating swordfish, a thing I had never eaten, and just as she was saying something I thought foolish I was overtaken by the palpitations and nausea, and had to rise and, without a word, walk out of the restaurant. I looked back once and saw her staring in astonishment.

Such was my social life. And I had the habits that remain with soldiers. One in particular . . . when I went walking I would keep an eye peeled for an enemy position. If there were an open field I would think, "How are we going to get across that?" I imagined lying again on a railroad embankment in Normandy, waiting to be told to go over it in spite of the bullets that were sweeping to and fro directly above me. That day I was sure I would be killed. Or I was in a graveyard in Holland with shells falling and the living getting mixed in with the dead. I was in the Ardennes, standing in a foxhole among trees covered with snow, and stamping my feet. They were freezing.

The University informed me that before I could return I had to be cleared by their doctor. He picked up a folder and said, "You aren't going to be so taken up with your music, are you?" The question was probably one of their tricks, to test my sanity. He spoke again, saying that I ought to go out in the world and "meet the common man." I was silent. I had seen the common man . . . his guts spilled in a road, his limbs strewn in a field. The doctor told me that he could not recommend my returning to the

College. It was only on the way home that I realized he had been looking at the wrong folder. What would the musician, whose file it was, say when he was advised to give up writing poems and stories?

So I looked for work and found it . . . as a copyboy on a newspaper. If I stayed with it I might someday be a reporter. But this didn't appeal to me. I didn't have the fascination with gossip that a reporter needs to have—whether it is about a quarrel between nations or a politician and his mistress. Then I worked for an import-export firm as a packer, shipping “seconds,” damaged stockings or ballpoint pens with some small imperfection, not visible to the eye, to Brussels where such things were in demand. But this too did not appeal to me—to succeed in this kind of business you have to think about the money you can make, and I preferred to think about other things.

I went back to the University, but not by the front entrance. I slipped in by a side door, the School of General Studies that wasn't so particular about whom they let in. I took courses that met in the evening and on Saturday, and I worked at writing. I was no longer intent on writing prose and becoming a novelist . . . all that typing. I was unable to imagine someone who had a life different from my own, to feel intensely about such a person, sustain an interest in his fate for days, weeks, months . . . even years! That was what novelists had to do. I lacked consistency—my mind went shooting off in all directions—and I lacked patience. I couldn't take any pleasure in writing about furniture, or lighting a cigarette, the kind of stuffing of which fiction consisted.

Unless it were written by a great author, fiction had a fairly common plot, spun out for three or four hundred pages. But you could put everything that you felt and thought in the space of a poem. You could get it out of your system and put it behind you.

I had been granted a pension for my disability, and the checks for several months started coming all at once. I also had the G.I. Bill. I would be able to go to Paris. In the winter of '44 I had been hospitalized briefly in Paris. After Germany surrendered the regiment was stationed at Sens, and I was appointed managing editor of the regimental newspaper. The staff would take a truck to Paris to fetch the big rolls. I saw enough of the city to want to see more of it after the war.

I traveled to France on the *Queen Mary* and registered as a student at the Sorbonne. There were other Americans taking the course in “French Civilization and Culture,” but we had our own agenda, writing or painting. In any case, frequenting the cafés between St.-Germain-des-Prés and Boul’ Mich.

I have told this story before, but artists may make several paintings of the same subject. Why shouldn’t a writer tell a story again, seen in a different light? One night while I was in Paris I dreamed that I was walking with G Company along a strip of land with trees. There was water on each side. Suddenly shells began falling and I was lying prone. Bullets were sweeping the trees—a trunk a few inches above my head was slashed white. Someone close by was calling for his mother in Italian.

The next morning I wrote out the dream in ballad stanzas:

This was the shining green canal
Where we came two by two
Walking at combat interval.
Such trees we never knew . . .

As I wrote I realized that it wasn’t a dream but a memory . . . our first contact with the enemy. With this dream, other memories of the war began to return.

“Carentan O Carentan,” is well known, insofar as poetry is known in our time. It was set to music by a French composer, Aubert Lemeland, and played over the radio on the fiftieth anniversary of the landing of the Allied armies in Normandy . . . at the moment of the landing. This poem has also been set to music by the American composer Benjamin Lees. The strangest things come together if you live long enough. One moment, you are lying prone with bullets flying around you, mortar shells falling, and a man a few feet away dying and calling, “Mamma mia!” Blood is running down your back. The next moment you are writing about it. And half a century has gone by.

I am both the man there and then and the one who is writing this. Buddhists speak of seeing your life as part of a pattern. I do not have to practice Buddhism in order to do this—it happens when I write.

The process of regaining my memory began with the dream about Carentan. And there were other passages of my life that

had been lost—I had forgotten much of my life before the war. I pushed into memory as into some cloudy stuff. So I recovered the house in Jamaica where I lived when I was a child. I recovered the veranda with its climbing vine on which lizards crawled and croaked. The drawing room with the piano, the closet with Chinese and Russian objects, the Victrola with a handle that you wound, and the goldfish bowl on a stand. I was listening to a record on the gramophone, and moved back and knocked over the goldfish bowl. There were fragments of glass on the floor, and goldfish gasping and dying. I remembered how I wept.

Such events came back at a great distance, like a story that was read to me as a child. I pushed into the cloud of memory, and people and incidents reappeared, and were connected, and made sense.

Those who have had a break such as I have been describing live in fear of a relapse. You can never be sure. . . . The fear affects your behavior in all sorts of ways. You are afraid of the stranger inside you, the one who emerged . . . murderous Mr. Hyde to your good-natured, sociable Doctor Jekyll. You are afraid of yourself . . . you don't know what he may do. As a result you keep your feelings under lock and key.

An episode like this could destroy an artist—a composer of music, a painter, or writer. For the essence of art is self-expression. The poet Rimbaud stopped writing when he was only nineteen and at the height of his powers. People wonder at this . . . I do not. I think he saw shades of the madhouse in front of him, and preferred to be a trader and gunrunner in Africa.

There are artists—van Gogh comes to mind—who have psychotic episodes but don't let this hold them back. They just let themselves go. The end in such cases may very well be self-destruction, but they get themselves expressed. Which would one prefer to be, the man who kept his emotions under strict control, gave up writing, painting, or composing, and lived on as a “well-adjusted” man, or the one who blazed out and spent the rest of his life in darkness?

But isn't there an alternative to either of these ways? The more you pay attention to the world outside the self, and think about individuals and the things they do, the more interesting they become. It seems that they need to be expressed, and in expressing them you express the best part of yourself.

But it may take years to arrive at this. Those who have had the kind of break I have described fear a recurrence. A chance remark by a stranger strikes you to the heart . . . it is clear that he knows your weakness. The fear is accompanied by a feeling of shame. For it is a shameful thing to have been weak and at the mercy of others. I am reminded of what I have read about some of the prisoners in concentration camps. They felt ashamed. Of what? Of their suffering. It is a shameful thing to be weak. Their tormentors played upon this feeling . . . they deserved what was coming to them.

Some people after the war argued that the Jews were to blame for not defending themselves—they conspired with their executioners! Hannah Arendt spoke for this point of view. The Nazis would have been pleased . . . wasn't it just what they had been saying, that Jews were an inferior race? The fact is that some Jews defended themselves as well as they could. But if you are standing with your parents, and your wife and children, under the eyes of men armed with machine guns, what are you to do? What would Hannah Arendt have done? Torn a gun from the hands of the guards? And what if you believed as those Jews did that it was a sin to shed blood?

I relived the war almost every night in my dreams. This continued for years. When Miriam and I married she woke one night to sounds that were coming from different parts of the room: sounds of battle, shelling and gunfire. They were coming from me! I was projecting them like a ventriloquist.

I dreamed of encounters with the Germans that I never had. But I had anticipated such meetings as—this was my job—I walked alone among trees or over fields, carrying a message from G Company to Battalion. Or I dreamed about horrors . . . the field in Holland I had to walk through night after night. It was strewn with the dead bodies of German infantry and American paratroopers who had shot each other at close range. The bodies changed, putrefying and swelling. I had to walk around arms and legs and faces shining with corruption.

I used to think that having such dreams was a thing to be ashamed of. For what had I suffered in comparison with others? When I thought of them, the dead, and those who were in wheelchairs, or blinded, or insane, had I really known war at all?

What have we to complain of who have only known “soldier’s heart”? Nothing, sir, nothing at all.

Some years ago a man from Czechoslovakia came to interview me. He said he was conducting interviews with writers who had seen combat during the Second World War. I told him about the dreams I had about the war—at first almost every night. In recent years they had been tapering off. “Yes,” he said. He had been interviewing Russian soldiers, combat veterans. They had the same dreams. It was to be expected.

Why write about such things? Are they not better forgotten? After a war the millions who have been through it want to forget. It was terrible, and sordid, and boring. Besides, everyone knows the things you do. But time passes and the number of those who remember is suddenly diminished. Who remembers the Great War?

When I was a teacher and the subject of war came up, I would write a name on the blackboard: Somme. Who, I would ask, had heard of it? None of the students would answer. Only one or two knew anything at all about the Great War. I would tell them that the Somme was a battle in that war, a terrible battle in which thousands were killed or wounded . . . 60,000 casualties in the British army on the first morning alone. It was Hell on earth, but the men who went through it consoled themselves with a thought: “Generations will remember what we did here. It will never be forgotten.” Yet not one of the young people in front of me had ever heard of it.

I have not forgotten the men I knew in the 101st Airborne Division. The men and women I worked with in universities were pale and unreal in comparison. They were hollow and filled with words. For the essential human virtue, courage, without which there is no other, I give you “point,” the man walking up the road ahead of the company, his rifle held across his body at port arms.

What was I to think of the new breed of university professors, structuralists, post-structuralists, deconstructionists, who taught that experience had no meaning, that the only reality was language, one word referring to another, one “sign” to another, with no stop in any kind of truth? Who put the word “truth” in quotes?

It is right to remember such things as I have described—in the

first place, because those who have lived and died before us should be remembered, insofar as it is possible. Otherwise our own lives seem worthless. In the second place, war is a permanent human condition, and men and women will have to face it. It may help them to know how people no stronger physically or mentally than they have faced it. In any case, everything that human beings do is interesting, when you think about it.

The war and its aftermath changed me. It gave me a respect and affection for the so-called "common man" that I have never lost. As if any life were common! The men I knew in the 101st, most of them, had no education beyond high school. And they weren't stunning physical specimens either, though they could carry a pack, trench tool, rifle or carbine, machine gun, tripod or ammunition boxes, for miles at a good pace.

Most clearly of that battle I remember
The tiredness in eyes, how hands looked thin
Around a cigarette, and the bright ember
Would pulse with all the life there was within.

They complained about it, of course. Then why were they willing to go through it? They were not indoctrinated like the Germans and Japanese and Italians with a belief in their racial superiority and a right to enslave other peoples. What most of them wanted was to get the fighting over with and go home . . . to the good life. The life of every day.

I was different from the men around me in one respect . . . the war gave me poetry. I had had what some would call a troubled childhood, though at the time, with the sea and sky of the Caribbean, I wasn't aware of being troubled. My parents were divorced when I was seven years old, and my mother left Jamaica and returned to the States. She disappeared and no one told me why. So I grew up as a rather lonely boy, though I had friends at school. My father died when I was sixteen. There was no place for me, so I left the island and came to New York, an entirely different world. There must have been a great deal of trouble in my mind, and no doubt this surfaced as rage when, after the war, I had my break.

But I shall leave the cause to professional explainers of the psyche. What the war and its aftermath gave me was the feeling

that, since I had managed to survive, I owed no one anything for my existence—neither my parents nor the government. By moving my body some inches to the left or right, on more than one occasion I had saved my life. From now on it was my own, to do with as I liked.

I liked reading novels and poems. I could lose myself for hours, days even, in a story. And I had a driving need to write . . . a few lines for a poem, a paragraph of prose . . . anything! Even at the University there were very few who felt about such things as I did.

What did that matter? What if the only thing I could do was held in contempt by others . . . or just indifference? Most people cared nothing about the kind of writing that mattered to me more than anything else. They were deaf to the music. So what! I was alive, and doing what I liked.

JEAN STAROBINSKI

Water-Wheels: The Factory on the River

The first industrial revolution exploited the motive force of fire, and substantially perfected the techniques of the domestication of hydraulic power. Literary texts that can be placed in correlation with thermodynamics (steam engines, locomotives) do not appear until rather late in the nineteenth century. Émile Zola, above all, is cited as an example. On the other hand, the evocation of the great workshop, in which machines are driven by powerful vertical wheels to which the movement of a watercourse is transmitted, can be found very early in the century.

The image of the wheel on the river at first mainly pointed to the gristmill; it had long been part of an *idyllic* landscape. In this first aspect, a liberating value could be attributed to it. For the drawing and transporting of water, for the working of various tools, the hydraulic machine replaced the animal, the slave, children, women . . . For landscape painters, the mill, the spillway, the wheel became elements in the decor of rustic scenes. While the wheel turned, the shepherds danced. This wheel can be seen in Dürer, Ruysdael, Lorrain, Boucher . . . It can be heard in the Schubertian music of *Die schöne Müllerin*. Its regular rhythm is added to the song of the river, which remains a true melody. (We know, however, that the noise of fulling-mills, dressing cloth and leather, could be loud and frightening: a famous chapter of *Don Quixote* testifies to it.) In a great number of poems and pictures from the past two hundred years, the nostalgic regret for a bygone rural world is connected with this sort of ruin from the *pre-industrial* age. The mills that remain today are precious relics, lovingly kept up. The second industrialization—that of electricity, the atom, and robotization—has conferred an unexpected aesthetic value on the vestiges of the first industry, and *a fortiori* on the structures this first industry inherited from an earlier epoch.

The wheel—enlarged, reinforced, more effective—was thus a figure inseparable from the beginnings of the industrial era. Its presence alongside great factories, its clamor, its association with mechanical hammers, with the bellows that kept the forges glowing, its conjunction with images of chimneys and smoke in the sky are evidenced by any number of iconographic and textual documents. Thus one sees an ancient structure, a technology that goes back to antiquity, finding a place in a new context. In fact, through a whole set of texts from the nineteenth century, water and industry are in strict relation. The wheel marks the interface between nature and human technology. Its rotation is testimony to the transformation of physical energy into usable mechanical energy. At the moment of the burgeoning of industry, this image could become an ambiguous symbol: the symbol of mastery and the symbol of an implacable fatality.

Allow me an incidental remark here. My interest in the literary motif of the factory on the river comes, to be sure, from a taste for “thematic criticism”—practiced under certain conditions. A clarification is necessary. It has been thought that thematic criticism is connected with subjective determinations, with several well-delimited categories of a constituent human experience. It has also been believed that from the angle of various current approaches (empathic identification, stylistic study, psychoanalysis, phenomenology), thematic criticism aims at ahistorical results, with no relation to surrounding circumstances. I do not share this subjectivist conviction, attentive though I am to the role of personal choice in giving form to a great style. For my part, I have never considered that critical work should attach itself before all and above all to an analysis of the activities of consciousness, sensibility or imagination. In the present case—the mill and the factory on the river—the theme I wish to follow in several literatures concerns literary creation and social history, as well as the history of science and technology.

A theme, whichever it be, does not define itself as an intentional aim which an isolated privileged subject or various individuals reformulate independently from each other. I consider it rather as a nest of various sorts of relations. In a poem or a novel, it indeed has the value of a subjective index: it expresses an attitude, an intention, an uneasiness, an individual mode of perception; but it also has the value of an objective index: it designates an aspect of the world and of human history which has

acquired importance enough to become a component of the shared culture, of the transmitted languages, and insistently to attract the attention and the dreams of several writers. There may be themes that are immemorial; there are others—and that is the case with the one I am taking up here—which are bound to an era or an epoch. In all events, the theme, isolated, singularized, observable, implies on the one hand an identity (a “selfsameness” as they said in the eighteenth century), that is, the presence of a group of elements recognizable from one work to another, from one aesthetic domain to others, from the order of the real to that of the imaginary. But this identity, on the other hand, in no way excludes discontinuity, alteration, drift, decomposition or transmutation. The variation of a theme (or, on occasion, its disappearance) thus becomes a highly sensitive indicator of cultural changes or transferences. I attribute a particular importance to evolutive and differential thematics. Fertile though the hermeneutics of isolated works may be, I believe that still more can be expected of the interpretation of the evolving tissue of themes and problems, whether it is a question of conscious reception or of independent recurrences.

One may read, in the solid work by Terry S. Reynolds, *Stronger Than a Hundred Men* (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore-London, 1983), the history of the slow transformations of knowledge about the vertical wheel. The progress of mathematical quantification and exactitude took nearly two centuries, starting from Galileo, before it arrived at the definitive formulas of the nineteenth century and before the vertical wheel was replaced by the turbine. This history passed through Newton and his disciple Desaguliers, among others. Now, for William Blake, the name of Newton embodied in itself alone the whole development of the argument, demonstration, and strict application of the laws of motion. A development which the visionary poet held to be pernicious, and of which the wheel and its gear system were the dominant symbols. In the immense poem *Jerusalem*, the wheels that set the looms in motion are rivals of the wheels of paradise. These new wheels are those of mechanical exteriority, while the wheels of Eden were those of the interiority of life:

I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe
And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose woof rages dire,
Washed by the Water-wheels of Newton: black the cloth

In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation: cruel Works
 Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs
 tyrannic
 Moving by compulsion each other, not as those of Eden,
 which
 Wheel within Wheel, in freedom revolve in harmony and
 peace.¹

In *Europe*, Blake has Newton leap up, a “mighty Spirit,” who seizes the trumpet and makes it resound as an “enormous blast.” At this signal myriads of angels fall from heaven, “yellow as leaves of autumn,” dropping down into their earthly graves. In a world gripped by the compass and reasoning, heaven becomes depopulated, while the earth, under a black pall, is covered with furnaces and looms. Denounced by Blake as a messenger of misfortune, Newton was at almost the same moment disputed by Goethe, and considered by Leopardi as the author of a system which to be sure has long prevailed, but which, at bottom, is only “*un’ipotesi, e una favola, come Platone chiamava il suo sistema.*”² At this beginning of the nineteenth century, the poets seemed to want to make a common front against the mechanistic explanation of nature, and against its consequences.

Wordsworth, in *The Excursion* (1814), simultaneously evokes the increased wealth of England, and the dark face of this great change. The spectator cannot keep silent about what he has seen: “such outrage done to nature.” The rumbling river and the dizzy wheels form the backdrop, as the Traveler evokes the moment when the night shift relieves the day shift:

Disgorge are now the ministers of day;
 And, as they issue from the illumined pile,
 A fresh band meets them, at the crowded door—
 And in the courts—and where the rumbling stream,
 That turns the multitude of dizzy wheels,
 Glares, like a troubled spirit, in its bed
 Among the rocks below. Men, maidens, youths,
 Mothers and little children, boys and girls,

¹ William Blake, *Jerusalem*, I, 15, ll. 14–20.

² (“A hypothesis, and a fable, as Plato called his system.”) Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, 2709, 4056–4057.

Enter, and each the wonted task resumes
 Within this temple, where is offered up
 To Gain, the master idol of the realm,
 Perpetual sacrifice. . . .

Just as Blake opposed the wheels of industry to those of Eden, Wordsworth compares the schedule of the workshops, marked by the clock, to that measured out by religious ritual in the past; the sole legitimation of this loss of the sacred would be the extension of this power of mastery over nature to all the peoples of the earth; a hope for historical progress does not seem forbidden to him.

Triumph who will in these profaner rites
 Which we, a generation self-extolled,
 As zealously perform! I cannot share
 His proud complacency: —Yet do I exult,
 Casting reserve away, exult to see
 An intellectual mastery exercised
 O'er the blind elements; a purpose given,
 A perseverance fed; almost a soul
 Imparted—to brute matter. I rejoice,
 Measuring the force of those gigantic powers
 That, by the thinking mind, have been compelled
 To serve the will of feeble-bodied Man.
 For with the sense of admiration blends
 The animating hope that time may come
 When, strengthened, yet not dazzled, by the might
 Of this dominion over nature gained,
 Men of all lands shall exercise the same
 In due proportion to their country's need . . .³

But what alarms the Traveler, whom Wordsworth makes his spokesman, is the prospect of seeing industry invade the places so far spared. The dreaded image is then no longer that of the wheel, but that of the poison which will make dangerous the water which has so far remained pure. The stream that still flows freely, and whose limpid water still quenches the villagers' thirst, might become "an instrument of deadly bane."

³ William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book VIII, ll. 174–185, 196–213.

In some important works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mills on the rivers are great emblematic characters, sometimes glorious, sometimes suffering. I am thinking of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, of Bacchelli's *Mulini del Po*, of Janáček's opera *Jenůfa*. The mills embody a wealth halfway between landed property and urban capitalism. The vast mills are intermediaries between towns and fields. They are powerful and vulnerable, at the mercy of the caprices of closely neighboring nature, that is, of fire and great floods. Objects of possessive rivalries among individuals, sometimes abusively taxed by the State, they are the theater of family dramas, witnesses to social transformations and economic crises. It is hardly remembered that once upon a time the spirits of the water and the goblins of the earth used to meet there at midnight, or that the miller's apprentice was the floury Pierrot. But in the works I have just mentioned, whatever the dimensions of the mill and the amplitude of the problems of society, one cannot say that questions expressly bound to the progress of industrialization are raised. The mills represent a desirable possession, a value to be preserved because it is bound to the rhythm of the seasons, to the capricious eternity of earth and river. As we shall see, industrialization will fairly soon be perceived as that which threatens the survival of the mills.

For a more precise approach to the response of several great writers to the first industrialization, I propose to re-read several other works in which the image of the factory on the river not only becomes disturbing, but, in addition, the allusion to literary activity—an allusion either direct or allegorical to the situation of the one holding the pen—is strongly marked.

The first reading or re-reading which I suggest is that of the admirable opening of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. In the description of the little town of Verrières, in the Franche-Comté, we discover the intent to combine "picturesque" painting with the methods of economic statistics: it is this intent to make an inventory of places and economic resources that belongs to the era of industrialization, not the local industries themselves, whose technology is not the latest. The writer declares himself aware of society's entry into the era of industrialization by the manner in which he passes his glance over the site. The reader is immediately informed of the relief and hydrology of the place: "The Doubs flows a few hundred feet below the fortifications . . . A torrent, which rushes down the mountain, passes through Verri-

ères before spilling into the Doubs, and gives movement to a great many wood-cutting saws, a very simple industry that procures a certain well-being for the majority of the inhabitants, more peasants than bourgeois.” Added to it is the making of printed cloth, and above all the manufacture of nails, source of the wealth of M. de Rênal, mayor of the town:

Scarcely has one entered the town when one is deafened by the din of a noisy and terrible-looking machine. Twenty heavy hammers, which drop with a noise that makes the pavement tremble, are raised by a wheel moved by the torrent’s water. Each day, each of these hammers makes I do not know how many thousands of nails. It is fresh and pretty young girls who offer to the blows of these enormous hammers the small bits of iron which are swiftly transformed into nails.

To beautify the gardens of his residence, M. de Rênal has moved the sawmill of Père Sorel much lower down, on the Doubs, which, moreover, benefits and enriches the latter. In yielding to the nobleman’s vanity, the peasant has contrived to gain from the change. The disparity between high ground and low riverbank is symbolic. But the apparent disparity in the social hierarchy (haunted by feudal memory) loses all meaning if we stop at the evaluation of the forces that make the machines move. The water that activates the two machines—in the sawmill and the nail factory—establishes a *de facto* equality between the sly peasant who is Père Sorel and Rênal, who boasts of an ancient nobility. The motive force they both turn to a profit unites the two in the domain of production and of what Stendhal calls “the petty interests of money.” Rênal, to be sure, is a “capitalist” who employs young working-girls, while Sorel directs a family business in which he is helped by his sons. Still, the boards of the one call for the nails of the other. It is not forbidden to think of these boards and nails when, at the end of the novel, mention is made of the bier on which the decapitated body of Julien Sorel is carried to its grave.

The description of the movement of Père Sorel’s saw is a response to that of the machine for making nails:

A water-powered saw is composed of a shed on the side of a river. The roof is supported by a structure resting on four thick wooden pillars. Eight or ten feet up, in the middle of the shed, one sees a saw that goes up and down, while a very simple mechanism pushes a piece of wood against this saw. A wheel set in motion by the river makes this

double mechanism work; that of the saw which goes up and down, and that which gently pushes the piece of wood towards the saw that cuts it into boards.

There is nothing modern in this “very simple mechanism.” A precise description of its functioning can be found in books from the preceding century, notably in the beautiful *Hydraulic Architecture* (1737–1739) of the French engineer Bélidor. What is new, on the other hand, is the attitude of Julien Sorel, the rebellious son: his politico-military exaltation is combined with an active disdain of money and the means of getting it—for the mechanical industry of his father first of all. The first appearance of Julien in the novel shows him to us in a most eloquently symbolic situation and posture. He should have been supervising the mechanism of the saw. Instead, he is perched on one of the roof beams, absorbed in reading the *Mémorial de Ste. Hélène*.⁴ He has withdrawn to a higher place—the first of the elevated places where we so often see Julien take refuge. His father calls him. Julien, caught up in his dream, does not hear him:

The attention the young man gave to his book, far more than the noise of the saw, kept him from hearing the terrible voice of his father. Finally, despite his age, the latter jumped nimbly onto the tree submitted to the action of the saw, and from there onto the crossbeam that held up the roof. A violent blow sent the book flying from Julien’s hands into the river; a second equally violent blow, delivered in the form of a cuff to the head, made him lose his balance. . . .

The hero has tried to raise himself above a hostile world, to dominate it by identifying with the Emperor. But the implacable movement of the saw going mechanically up and down has nothing in common with an eagle’s flight. And the reader may already sense, in the saw slicing the wood, the cutting edge of the guillotine that will put an end to Julien’s life. The fundamental hostility is increased when the father intervenes: the fall of the book into the river makes nature an accomplice in the general persecution to which Julien feels himself exposed. The fallen book is not just any book: it is the testamentary work in which a

⁴ *Mémorial de Ste. Hélène*, by Emmanuel, Comte de Las Cases (1766–1842), who accompanied Napoleon in his exile and kept this journal of his talks with the emperor on all phases of his life.

hero, fallen himself, speaks of what his destiny was as a conqueror. The contrast between desire (and its dreamt space) and the real (and its exploited space) could not be greater. The young “intellectual hero” senses the feeling of opposition and negation growing in him.

After the disappearance of the society of the *ancien régime*—a society of hierarchical orders—the post-revolutionary world saw correlatively established the juridical equality of conditions, and the calculative rationality that masters nature, that rules the laws of productivity and profit, thus establishing an effective basis for all real interactions. It is this world of calculation that is unacceptable to the man of ambitious passion, the man of original and personal language—the writer. Through the destiny of the proud individual and climber who is Julien Sorel, Stendhal proposes to reject at once the inequalities of rank inherited from aristocratic society and the calculative and leveling egalitarianism claimed by the competitors engaged in the struggle for industrial success. The novel, in its development, will brilliantly make explicit the symbolic message inscribed in the decor of the first chapters: the wheels on the river. To which another theme will be added in counterpoint: the exile of beauty. Streams are beautiful only when they wind freely through wild nature. M. de Rênal, a limited man, diverts watercourses. And Stendhal notes that in France, the hand of man spoils nature. But in Italy, according to him, it will go differently . . . I will refrain here from citing all the examples in which Stendhal’s *italianità* goes together with his anti-industrialism.

Other texts from the nineteenth century ought to hold us following that of Stendhal. I will turn my choice toward two stories of considerable scope. Both speak to us of the production of paper, which designates, a final referent of the narration, the very pages we hold in our hand as we read that narration. The book thus contains an evocation of that which, prior to writing and printing, makes the book materially possible. These two texts, by a singular coincidence, both speak to us of the separation of the sexes in the organization of labor.

The Tartarus of Maids (1855), by Herman Melville, is a text that corresponds, by inverse symmetry, to the *Paradise of Bachelors*, describing the comfortable existence of old boys living in the

Temple in London. A whole ocean separates this masculine community from the young girls laboring in a New England workshop. The working-girls glimpsed in Verrières have become the heroines of the story: they have ceased to be “fresh and pretty.” The story is the account by a seed merchant of his winter visit to a paper mill. As his business is prosperous, he has need of sheets of paper which he uses as envelopes for the seeds he sends out. He needs thousands of them, and he hopes to supply himself at a better price by going to the maker himself. This, in a season of deep frost, is a journey to hell. The hydraulic wheel is the heart of that hell.

Toponymy lends an almost too obvious allegorical value to the places passed through. The goal of the journey is located at the foot of Woedolor Mountain. We must first travel through lugubrious hills, then cross a windswept pass which, in memory of a mad old maid’s cabin, is called “the Mad Maid’s Bellows-pipe.” At the end of the gorge, we climb a narrow wheel-road; it ends in a Dantesque portal; the rock narrows to a point called “Black Notch,” then we descend through “Plutonian” mountains, called “the Devil’s Dungeon” by the local inhabitants. A red torrent, called “Blood River,” rushes into this valley. There, on a dominant point, we see the ruins of “an old sawmill.” And at the bottom of the Dungeon, against a background of somber pines, appears a big white building that makes one think of a “sepulcher.” One might ask oneself if the parts of this landscape do not stand, metaphorically, for parts of a formidable body.

The traveler is welcomed by a character with a gloomy face. We learn that he is the owner, that he is a bachelor, and that he is called Old Bach—which is one of the Devil’s nicknames. In fact, he exercises the same tyranny over his factory as Claggart, the perverse master-at-arms in *Billy Budd*, does over his crew of sailors. The new arrival is honored with a tour of the place. He is guided by a pert young man whose name is Cupid. Should we understand him as Amor? He is singularly unoccupied. Or as cupidity? It is omnipresent in the organization of labor. There are only young girls in this factory. And what do we see to begin with? “At rows of blank looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper.” The paper is imprinted, by the action of the machines, with a decoration (a garland of roses) and lines, and the narrator

perceives that the foreheads of the pale young girls bear the same lines. They are "ruled," and the term also implies the mark of domination. The work is carried out servilely, in the most complete muteness:

Not a syllable was breathed. Nothing was heard but the low, steady overruling hum of iron animals. The human voice was banished from the spot. Machinery—that vaunted slave of humanity—here stood menially served by human beings, who mutely and cringingly served as the slaves serve the Sultan. The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels.

The young girls are merely gears. The true mistress of the place is the great wheel moved by the torrent. We are not slow to perceive it:

"Come first and see the water-wheel," said this lively lad, with the air of boyish-brisk importance. Quitting the folding-room, we crossed some damp, cold boards, and stood beneath a great wet shed, incessantly showering with foam, like the green barnacled bow of some East Indiaman in a gale. Round and round here went the enormous revolutions of the dark colossal water-wheel, grim with its one immutable purpose.

A new machine, in addition, allows for the speeding up of the paper-making starting from the pulp. We watch the process, which takes exactly nine minutes! These nine minutes sum up the nine months of gestation. For here the allegory makes us understand that the product of fabrication—paper—replaces real procreation. Melville's organic allusions leave no room for error. The paper pulp in its vat is "a white, moist, woolly substance resembling the albuminous part of an egg cooked in the shell." And the workshop is filled with a "strange, sanguine, abdominal, suffocating warmth." It is not difficult to understand that the evil spell of the workshop consists in an exteriorization, in an alienation (the word is exactly appropriate here) of the movement of life. The narrative allegory seems itself to be part of this process of displacement. The red torrent which activates the wheel is the blood of the chlorotic working-girls, vowed to celibacy, to sterility, to a speedy death. The paper, a mechanical parody of pregnancy, product of a sort of begetting, becomes an indeterminate surface: on this vacant thing will be inscribed the *acts* of a life that these girls will not live.

Looking at that blank paper continually dropping, dropping, dropping, my mind ran on in wonderings of those strange uses to which those thousand sheets eventually would be put. All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things—sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death warrants, and so on, without end.

The narrator-spectator's reverie sees imprinted on these sheets the faces of these martyred young girls, which he implicitly compares with the face of the tormented Christ:

A fascination fastened on me. I stood spell-bound and wandering in my soul. Before my eyes—there, passing in slow procession along the wheeling cylinders, I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day. Slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly, they gleamed along, their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper, like the print of the tormented face on the handkerchief of Saint Veronica.

It is the prefiguration, within the story, of the material necessary for the transmission of the story: the use of paper to recount the visit to the paper mill, and to eternalize the slow death of the young girls. For it is permissible to identify the writer with the man who designates himself as a seed merchant. Disseminating seed is analogous to an act of procreation. But the envelopes in which the new lives will be transported have for their own substance innumerable sacrificed lives. Against mechanical violence, the narrator has opted in advance for vegetal life. But the paper of his envelopes is not innocent. The mystery of evil remains intact.

Of a less allegorical tenor, but rich in dreams and symbols, George Sand's *The Black Town* describes a place in Auvergne (actually the town of Thiers) where the waterfalls serve for the production of cutlery and paper. The situation at the beginning is characterized by the separation of the industries, the separation of the sexes (the boys are cutlers, the girls paper-makers), and the separation of social strata (there is an upper town and a lower town). George Sand's reconciling imagination gives the story a nuptial and musical ending: all the oppositions are resolved, all the antagonisms are surmounted by love. The final chapter of the book is a cantata—an *epithalamium* composed by a poet-worker—

the recitatives of which are sung by Severio, "the handsome singer, the skilled Italian plasterer, newly arrived in those parts for some artful work on the town hall of the upper town." Thus a work of lyric art comes to crown and surpass the novel. The chorus ends: "Cry out now, powerful wheels! Sing and leap, blessed river! Irons and fire, anvils and hammers, holy voices of work, order the dance. You will not drown out the voice of love; today is the hymeneal feast!" To Melville's demonization of industry, George Sand seems to have wanted to reply with a joyful idyllization. It is needless to add that this tone of exaltation will be found only rarely in the literature of the twentieth century, even in the neighborhood of the various futurisms, even when it is a question of celebrating, in praise of the party and its engineer-in-chief, the collective effort leading to the construction of great dams and combinats. We may perhaps discover a few simplistic hymns composed in honor of the Dnieprostroi, but it suffices to glance into Ehrenburg's *Second Day of Creation*, published at the beginning of the Stalin era, to see that the frank maternal optimism of George Sand could set no fashion in the conditions of modernity.⁵

Some additional comments:

The name of Wilhelm Raabe (1831–1910) remains too little known outside of Germany. And yet he is one of the principal literary witnesses to the industrialization of his country. Now, having spoken of the disappearance of the mills under the effect of industrialization, the best testimony I can bring forward is a novel by Raabe, *Pfisters Mühle* (*Pfister's Mill*), which dates to 1884. It is the story of the death of a mill. A big sugar factory has been installed upriver. It discharges pollutants, which give off an intolerable stink. The mill, which was also a wayside inn, loses its clientele. The water becomes viscous. Poor Pfister dies of it. The story is presented as the journal kept by his son, become a teacher

⁵ French has borrowed the word *combinat* from Russian, where it refers to a large industrial complex uniting a number of related enterprises on the same territory.

The *Dnieprostroi* is a hydroelectric station on the Dniepr River in the Ukraine.

The Second Day of Creation is a novel by Russian writer Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967), also known for his memoirs of the Stalin era.

of ancient languages, who comes with his young wife to spend a last summer in the already sold building. This novel, written with great art, is at the same time one of the first literary documents, if not the very first, on the pollution of rivers. Literature is implicated in this story in the grotesque and pathetic character of the dramatist Lippoldes, who drowns himself after drinking too much rum at the factory. It is constantly present in the mind of the narrator, who finds refuge in poetry. (For example, he knows by heart and recites *L'Infinito* in the translation of Georg Brandes!⁶)

Le Soleil des eaux (*The Sun of the Waters*) is a "spectacle" by René Char which he dates to 1946, the action of which takes place in 1904, that is, twenty years after the date when *Pfisters Mühle* appeared in Germany. The subject of the two texts is the same, in a wholly different context. A factory is installed on the Sorgue, a fish-filled river from which a small population of fishermen makes its living. It is a paper factory, which disrupts the flow of the water with a dam and discharges chlorine. The trout die. This is unacceptable for the fishermen, who revolt and blow up the dam. In Char's work, the mill will remain a word attached to the thought of the past: the past of a place, the past of a childhood. One of his books from before the war is entitled *Moulin premier* (*First Mill*). We can no longer go down rivers, except by contemplating them from above, along the cleft they run through. But one must have gone back up as close as possible to the source. The only movement possible for the poet is a "return upstream," a "*ritorno sopramonte*," an anabasis.⁷

In fact, the uneasiness of poets in the face of a more or less mastered physical force has not ceased. But the major force no longer belongs to the mass of waters. It resides in the heart of the atom; and the water of the rivers serves at most in the circuits of cooling-towers. Energy, and its danger, no longer have their dwelling in the factory on the river. The latest poem I know of (and a very beautiful one) to speak of a dam is the *Chant de la Grande Dixence* (*Song of the Grande Dixence*) by Maurice Chappaz.

⁶ *L'Infinito* is one of the most well-known poems of Giacomo Leopardi; Georg Brandes (1842–1927) was an influential Danish philosopher and literary critic.

⁷ *Return Upstream* (*Retour amont*) is the title of another work by René Char.

Perhaps the factory and its wheels only interrupted a very ancient dialogue between the poet and the waters, which is being taken up again today in the vicinity of the sources. This leads us to think that for the poets the production of mechanical energy or electrical energy was like a deviation, which made them jealous. The factory robbed them of their possession. It has changed location, though the rivers are far from having been returned to their natural life. But the poets are rediscovering their right (which since Horace or Petrarch had always been theirs) of establishing intimate relations with the generosity of water springing from its source. To listen to the voice of the torrent of the river is to question oneself about the powers of the poetic voice, about the possibility of giving utterance to passing and loss, multiplicity and unity, memory and self-forgetting. The recent poems on torrents or rivers which have marked my experience as a reader all have a questioning or interrogatory character. Thus Andrea Zanzotto:

*Fiume all'alba
acqua infeconda tenebrosa e lieve
non rapirmi la vista
non le cose che temo
e per cui vivo
Vocativo, "Fiume all'alba"*

Or Mario Luzi:

*"Tu che tieni stretto il filo
di rete nel labirinto
dove sei che mi guida" esclamo io
non si sa bene a chi,
compagno fedele o ombra.
Su fondamenti invisibili, "Il Fiume"⁸*

⁸ An English translation of Zanzotto's lines:

River at dawn
water infertile shadowy and soft
do not rob me of sight
nor of the things I fear
and by which I live

Or Philippe Jaccottet, writing about the waters of the Col de Larche, which on the Italian side is the Passo de la Maddalena, taking up in his turn the image of the labyrinth:

... Is it so wonderful, after all, and so important, to recover your childhood, as if you were recovering the thread of the labyrinth you will have been?

I do not think, at bottom, that that was what the word seemed to say to me, issuing suddenly from the stone mouth . . .

The torrent speaks, if you wish, but with its own voice: the noise of water. Could it be then that, without my having realized it till now (the mind is decidedly quite slow, quite obtuse), I am seeking to utter the interior of that noise, of that rush? The invisible, in these waters, by which they touch what I might have of the invisible in me?

Après beaucoup d'années, "Au col de Larche"

The theme to which I have attached myself all along, before the evocation of these present-day voices, concerned the poetic or narrative representation of a *visible* aspect of industrialization. But it should also have been said that in the epoch of the first industrialization, the poets (Wordsworth in particular) turned from the plains where industry installed itself, to direct their steps and their regard towards the high mountains, towards the sources of the rivers. This was not merely a flight, it was a response and a reminder of what comes first and cannot be forgotten. In their own fashion, on an earth whose landscapes have changed so profoundly, the writers of today have every reason to persevere in this interrogative relation with height and origin. Elusive as this relation with the waters of beginning may be, the future has meaning only starting from there.

[Translated by Richard Pevear]

And of Luzi's lines:

"You who hold tight to the net's
thread in the labyrinth
where are you who guide me" I cried
not really knowing to whom,
faithful companion or shade.

ROBERT McDOWELL

Red Foxes

Insomnia pushed Nessa over the falls,
Her boat made of nothing but her own skin.
Deep in the comforter she curled like a baby
Waiting for sleep to return. Under the down
She willed herself a dream, but nothing came.
Nothing but cold and the prickly, pre-dawn stillness.
As fast as a ghost she stepped out of her sleeper,
Pulled on her woolen shirt and knee-high socks,
Her jeans and Red Wing boots. The glowing clock
Read three as Nessa hustled to the window
Above the field of young rye grass. The crop
Lay under the fog like a military haircut
Waiting to explode in warmer weather,
But winter always stayed too long. She tiptoed
Past her parents' room and down the stairs.
Nessa wondered how they could sleep tonight.

Bundled up in a coat, a hat and gloves,
She headed for the field beyond the barn
And longed for the voice to call her—

“Come into the field

Where all of us are living out our time.”

Instead, not very high up in the fog
She heard the staggered honks of migrating geese.
They reminded her of students on a bus
Who squirm and *yak yak yak* to steer the time.
And *did* the leader really know the way?
She shivered, thinking *I am not alone*.
Instinctively she angled left and saw
A low shape moving calmly through the mud.
Nessa slowed down, peering into the fog,
And met the red eyes glowing in the dark.

"I know you," Nessa said. "Lady Possum,
 Your belly must be as empty as a can
 For you to be prowling so late on this grumpy night."
 She matched the possum's pace. "I wish you'd speak,"
 She said, "if only to explain your eyes.
 How come they're red in the dark? My cat's are yellow.
 What color do you see when you look at mine?"

They paralleled each other up the fence line
 To the corner where the possum disappeared
 In the thicket growing round the apple trees
 That Nessa's people abandoned years ago.
 She watched the possum burrow out of sight
 And thought about the buyers moving in.
 Would they have children? *Odds are they'll be improvers,*
 She told herself, *removing this nest of vines*
And driving out the birds and animals;
They might break up the farm to sell off lots . . .

Nessa darkened. *They might clear-cut the hill—*
 Just like their neighbor down Gap Road, the one
 Who never has a word for anyone
 Even when spoken to. He puts down traps
 For possum, stray cats, skunks, anything
 That dares to live where he's put up a fence.
 In Nessa's memory, hardly a week
 Had passed without the stop-your-heart report
 Of his rifle, and many times he'd need two rounds
 (The second even worse, meaning he'd failed
 To kill his victim with a single shot).

When she was younger Nessa shot a bird.
 She was playing Annie Oakley. Her friend Ramon
 Had handed her his Christmas BB gun.
 She raised the barrel, sighting a mockingbird
 On a telephone wire. "One shot," she told her friend.
 Impossible. They both laughed at her bragging
 As she squeezed the trigger, then the bird fell down.
 Ramon picked up the rifle, ran for home,

While Nessa, unbelieving, held the bird,
 Refusing to accept the death she'd made.
 So that was how easy making death could be.

*

While Nessa walked her father sat in his chair
 Between the woodstove and east-facing window.
 He felt his years in the hands that held the cup,
 In his heart that beat too loudly in his head.

"The bankers must hold papers on the fog
 As well as the farm," he told himself. "Damn them."

A sheet of damp wood sizzled in the stove
 Then blistered and exploded, arcing through
 The open doors to the carpet. William was slow
 To move, and in that indecisive moment
 Flared a crazy thought: *The house is old,*
It's possible. But sense (or habit) prevailed.
 He stamped on the ember, smiling at little burns
 That scarred the carpet, a map of almost-fires.
 A door creaked open, draft of cold air struck.

"It's Daddy," William said. "I'm by the fire."

Nessa kissed his cheek. He touched her hair
 As she laid her head on his chest. She smelled of fog.

"You've been out walking," he said. "Did you circle the field?"

She nodded, leaning back to look at him.

"Come, red fox, be my guardian," Nessa
 Whispered, as she had so many times
 At bedtime when her father told her stories
 Of the woods and fields. "Come, red fox, be our guide."

William turned to the woodstove saying, "Our luck's
 Run out. Nothing will lift us up today."

Then Nessa's eyes were wet. She wrapped her arms
 Around her father's middle from behind,
 Hugging so fiercely it took him by surprise,
 His power escaping like water over stone.
Like fog rolling over ditches, she thought.
 They stood together, silent, sharing that touch
 Until a bell ringing set them both
 In motion. William hung the woodstove screen;
 Nessa shook out the wheelchair's blanket and pillow
 As William climbed the stairs, and moments later
 Came down again, holding his wife in his arms.

*

By then the auctioneer was soaking up
 A streak of egg yolk with a wedge of rye.
 The banker across the table skimmed the paper,
 Impatient to go. The older man could read him.

"A minute," he said, "and two more maple bars."

He signaled the waitress, requesting one more coffee
 For the road. "I've got to have that kick," he said.
 The banker thought of his final college term,
 Living on speed as he drove toward his degree.
 Now his job was easier. The figures,
 The plusses and minuses bracketing his life
 Made feeling a cinch; he felt the bottom line.

The auctioneer was different, a local boy
 And former football star at Central Linn;
 But game days in the fifties were far away.
 Twice married, supporting five kids in their teens,
 He specialized in liquidating estates,
 Making hard times harder, talking faster
 To anaesthetize the crowd's collective thought.
 Foreclosures were the worst. The night before
 He always felt remorse, especially

If he knew the family. But experience
 Had calmed him down. The victims on sell-off day
 Would suffer their greatest grief, and then go on.
 (Wasn't there a famous play like that?
 He couldn't recall, his reading days remote.)
 It was always the same. The family
 Might watch till early afternoon, then leave.

The banker's sudden question made him laugh.
 "Has anybody been shot at one of these?"

He picked his teeth. The auctioneer said *no*
 And asked if he had ever seen the place.

"Not me. I see it when we sell it off.
 Sometimes I wish I worked home loans instead,
 But that gets messy, too. You get involved,
 You know what I mean? And when the loan blows up
 You feel responsible. That's not for me."

*

Nessa's mother smoothed the shawl on her legs
 And stared at the fire. She drew a rattling breath
 As if to say *I'm finished with this now.*

"Can I get you something, Momma?"

"You've been in the field.
 You saw them, then?" the older woman asked.

"I stumbled on a possum. I heard some geese,
 But dark and fog were over everything.
 I felt them in the shadows watching me,
 But I didn't see them, no." Nessa wished
 That for once she could have told a healing lie—

*If only foxes carried us away,
Or wrapped a magic shawl around the farm—*

She shook her head, facing the present once more,
And noticed her mother staring, far away.
“The fog has lifted a little,” Nessa said.

*

They picked at breakfast, listening to the drone
Of strangers working, setting up the yard.
The auctioneer’s assistant shuffled in,
A clipboard in hand, a pencil behind one ear.

“Boss says we’ll sell the tools and tractor first.”

He spoke, not really to them but just to hear
A familiar sound. It kept him company.
It shielded him from the crippled woman’s stare
(he felt for them, but hell, this was his job).
“Most folks are done by two o’clock,” he said.
“So there’s our window.”

Nessa liked that thought—
A window that could suddenly be shut.

*

The turnout was good. Men were there for tools;
Women picked over tables for smaller things—
Kitchen appliances, bedding, handmade clothes,
A chair admired at a social long ago.
Nessa knew the auction etiquette,
Her family’s place. Even their neighbors would turn
Away from them, keeping their hands busy.
She knew her job: to make them feel less guilty.
Embarrassing? Of course, she told herself.
She had seen her shame and loss on other faces,

On other days. Now the things they loved changed hands.
 Her mother's face was stony as the quilts
 She'd made sold quickly at a modest price.
 Antique dealers? Nessa guessed they were.
 When a batch of her mother's dresses came on the block
 She turned away.

Out to the barn she ran.

Standing in the empty, hay-sweet place,
 Which looked so big with no machinery,
 She traveled back, remembering the summer
 Her father and his friend had wrestled beams
 Of pressure-treated lumber into place,
 Restoring a foundation so delicate
 It seemed a gust of wind might flatten it.
 And once, while Nessa watched, the jack that held
 A section up collapsed, the roof descending
 Three feet or so, but holding as the two
 Men in the loft yelled out in fear, then laughed
 To see the roof intact, themselves alive.

But now her senses told her *look around*.
 Stepping soundlessly to the rough-cut door
 Of a small side room, she saw in its dusty light
 Her father hauling a strongbox out of the ground.
 William looked younger than she knew him to be.

It's money, enough to save us,
she heard him say
 Though he did not speak. A raincloud covered the sun,
 And in that purple light the man with his booty
 Went into the air like smoke on a damp burn day.

"I'm breathing too much of this barn's old fevered air,"
 She said, but there the fox stood at the door.
 Then girl and animal traveled into each other
 As far as they could, into the spirit's house
 Where the red fox said,

"Into the world we're born,
 Then out we're called again. Go back to your people.
 They're calling you like foxes call up the night."

Then he was gone, but Nessa could hear the voice
 As she ran back to the heat of the furious sale.
 Her mother was already seated in the Ford
 While William stood off by the oak tree with a friend.
 She caught his eye, he broke free with a nod.

"I'm ready now," she said.

They backed away
 From the house and barn, quiet in memory,
 As the crowd around the auctioneer closed ranks,
 Shutting them out, glad to see them going.

*

Southwest, then west by Courtney Creek they drove,
 The trailer like a pendulum behind.
 They stared, not at the fields around them, but
 At years behind them. The sky filled up with clouds.
 A soft rain fell as William hit the lights.

They had nowhere to go, only relations
 In Washington who could put them up for a spell.
 They'd look for a rental, maybe a doublewide
 On a farm where one or more of them could work.
 William squinted, wiping at windshield mist
 With the back of his sleeve.

"Stop!" his wife commanded.
 She had seen them first, the bareheaded man and his dog
 Who were walking without baggage down the road.
 Perhaps the man had put his car in the ditch
 And needed help, she thought. Somehow she knew
 He wasn't homeless, and even if he were
 What did it matter now they were homeless, too.
 They slowed to a crawl, and William spoke to the man.

"It's wet out there. You'd better ride with us."

The stranger nodded, climbing in back with Nessa.
 His dog, a tri-color Sheltie, sat between them.
 Nessa looked them over. Her first impression

Was that the man was young, but now she saw
 She couldn't really tell how old he was.
 The man looked fit. His eyes and face were good,
 So she stroked his dog, who leaned on her for more.

"He looks a little like a fox," she said.

"That's so," the man agreed. It's then she noticed
 His eyes were like the dog's, like eyes she'd seen
 So many times in the fields, out in the dark.
 "He's always been my guide," he said, and smiled.

Nessa's mother turned to look at them.
 "It's funny you should put it that way," she said,
 "Especially today." Her daughter trembled.

"So where you headed?" William's nervous eyes
 In the mirror were on the stranger.

"Nowhere," he said.

"It doesn't really matter where I go;
 What counts is how I make out while I get there.
 Each day there's something new to lift us up.
 Today we needed help, and there you were."

"Yes," the woman in the front seat said.
 "That's how it was." She reached for William's hand
 And even he could sense a change in them.
 Nessa felt it, too, the silky fur
 Between her fingers. The Sheltie nuzzled her,
 And movement out the window caught her eye.
 Beyond the stranger's shoulder, in the field
 She saw two foxes running easily,
 Paralleling their car.

Then all were watching,
 The dog as well, as Nessa smoothed his hair.
 The foxes ran and ran until they vanished
 In the longer grasses bordering the field.
 At the interstate the travelers were calm,
 Even grateful as they found their way.

JOAN WICKERSHAM

In the Heart

This is what my father did. He got up, showered, shaved, and dressed for work. He went downstairs and made a pot of coffee, and while it was brewing he went outside and walked the quarter-mile driveway to pick up the newspaper. He left the paper folded on the kitchen table, poured a cup of coffee and carried it upstairs and put it on my mother's bedside table. She was still in bed, sleeping. Then he went into his study, closed the door, and shot himself.

My mother heard a popping sound. She was up by then, on her way into the shower. The coffee wasn't hot; she drank it anyway. When she was dressed, she took the empty cup down to the kitchen. He wasn't there, but she didn't think he would have left for work without saying goodbye, and there were no breakfast dishes in the sink. Usually he made two pots of coffee, a big one with caffeine for her and a smaller one of decaf for himself. But the smaller pot was empty, cold, clean. She called his name. She saw the paper on the table, unfolded it and read the front page. She went upstairs to her study, next to his, and rummaged in the closet for a tablecloth she meant to iron. She set up the ironing board and called his name again. His hearing was bad; sometimes he didn't answer when she called. She went and knocked at his study; she pushed the door open. She found him. She called Ted Tyson and told him to come over. She called the police.

I thought I knew why Ted Tyson would be calling me at eight in the morning. My mother had told me he was planning to come up to Boston soon, and I'd said he could stay with us. "Really?" she'd said. "Really?"

"Sure, why not?" I had said. I was always trying to think of ways to prove to her that I liked him. But I had never really expected him to take me up on my offer.

"Ted!" I said warmly now. "Ted, how *are* you?"

"I have some bad news," he said.

"Oh?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "Your father has taken his own life."

We didn't say anything in the car, driving to Connecticut. It took three hours. My husband drove, and I looked out of the window. Our three-year-old son sat in the back seat, looking at his truck books, murmuring to himself. He had a music box with him, one that my father had brought him from Switzerland. There was a little man inside, dressed in a clown suit. My son kept passing it to me through the gap between the seats; I kept winding it up, the little man's arms and legs dangling loose and wild, and passing it back to him.

At Waterbury we got off the highway and pulled into the parking lot of a new hotel. We were early; my husband's stepfather was meeting us at 11:45. We went inside. We wandered through the lobby, along corridors carpeted in undersea green. Men in suits were going into the restaurant. I looked at all their faces. My son stood in front of a glass shelf of stuffed animals in the gift shop, looking but not touching. "Isn't he a precious," said the old lady working there. "Isn't he a love." She smiled at me. "I have a little grandson just that age," she said. "He comes to lunch with me every Tuesday."

"Really?" I said.

"There's Jerry," said my husband.

"What happened?" Jerry asked us in the lobby.

"We're not sure yet," I said. "We think it must have been a heart attack."

We handed him our son's overnight bag and all of us went back out to the parking lot. We moved Robert's car seat from our car to Jerry's green Rolls-Royce. I watched him strap Robert in and drive away; the car was so big that I couldn't see even the top of Robert's head in the window.

When we got back into our car, I asked my husband if he thought the body would still be in the house when we got there. I looked at the dashboard clock. "It's been over four hours," I said. "Four and a half by the time we get there. He'll be gone by then, won't he?"

"Oh, I'm sure," said my husband, clearing his throat.

"What do they need to do?" I said. "Look around. Talk to my mother. Take pictures. Do you think they take pictures?"

"I don't know," he said, clearing his throat again. "Probably."

My parents' house was in a cold pocket. The town was in a deep, rocky valley, and their house lay in a dip in the road, behind a mirror hanging from a tree. A police car sat at the entrance, between the low stone walls, red and blue lights flashing. We turned in and stopped, and the policeman got out and started walking toward our car.

"Get out," I told my husband. "Go talk to him over there."

I didn't look at them while they were talking. I looked out of my window, at a white opaque patch of ice on the driveway. My husband got back in, and rolled down the window.

"You can't go in there yet," the policeman said. He was talking to me. I looked at his black belt, his blue-black jacket puffed above it. "Your mother's over at Mr. Tyson's house. We asked her if she wouldn't rather be with a woman friend, but she said no, she wanted to be with him."

My mother was sitting in a big blue-and-white striped armchair, in front of Ted Tyson's kitchen fireplace. There was a fire going. There was a plaid blanket over her, and Kleenex in her fist. She held out her hand to me, and I went down on my knees in front of her. "Oh, the horror," she said, "do you know? The horror." She was shivering. I rubbed her hand between mine; her skin was loose and very dry, like crumpled tissue paper.

"Can you imagine what I went through, finding him like that?" she said.

I kept on rubbing her hand. There were shelves behind her, built into the corner, filled with square glass bottles of Ted's herb vinegar. He had given me a bottle of that vinegar for Christmas six weeks before. Ted was standing at the counter, stirring something on the stove.

"He was at the desk?" I asked my mother.

"No, in the chair."

"What chair?"

"The armchair."

"There is no armchair in that room."

"Of course there is," she said. "Why would I invent an armchair?"

I couldn't get it out of my head that he'd been at the desk, slumped over the piles of papers that had killed him. "What color is it?" I asked.

"I don't remember," she said.

"Where was the gun?"

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't see the gun. He was sitting in the chair, with his feet on the footstool. His feet were like this." She stuck her own feet out from the blanket, crossing them at the ankles. "He looked so peaceful. You know how they always say that, he looked peaceful? Well, he did. I shook him. I kept saying, Bill, wake up."

"But you knew he was dead."

Her hand was shaking. "There was all this blood."

"Where? Where was the blood?"

"Here." She took her hand out of mine and drew a shape on her chest, like a bib. "He shot himself in the heart."

I looked over at Ted. There was a woman in the kitchen with him, helping him cook. That must be Annette, the cabaret singer who was always coming up from New York to stay with him. Ted paid her rent when she was short of money, my mother had told me. He got her jobs, he introduced her to people in the record business. She was lazy, she used him, my mother said. Annette saw me looking at her; she smiled at me and lifted her hand in a limp little wave. I looked at my mother again.

"Why there?" I said. "Why in the heart?" My hand went to my chest, feeling around for my own heart. "How did he know exactly where to aim? That's risky, the heart. You could miss, or hit a rib. Why not the head?"

The blanket was slipping down; she pulled it up to her chin again. "I guess because he thought it would be less messy. He was trying to spare me. You know how considerate he was."

Ted came over and handed us coffee, in big white china mugs. My mother drank some of hers. "You want to hear something weird?" she said. "He cleaned his closet, before he did it. I was asleep, but I heard him. I must have opened my eyes for a second. He was straightening out his sweaters on the top shelf. Isn't that strange? But he was so neat. In thirty-five years I never had to pick

up after that man. Not one dirty sock. I want you to say that, at the funeral."

"He was getting the gun," I said.

"What?"

"Was that where he kept it?"

She didn't answer me for a moment. Then she said, "I don't know. I guess maybe it was." Then, "You think so? Oh, my God, why didn't I just wake up? Why didn't I sit up and say good morning? Then he wouldn't have done it."

"Yes he would," I said. "Maybe not this morning, maybe not right then. But sometime."

"No," she said. "The moment would have passed. I could have gotten him through the moment."

She drank more coffee. She told me about the coffee he made, how he only made one pot.

"So he knew," I said. "It wasn't just a moment." I thought of him bringing her coffee up the stairs, putting it on her night table, knowing. Apologetic, I thought, like a dog bringing its master's slippers when it knows it's done something bad.

"He tried so hard to take care of me," my mother said.

"How can you shoot yourself in the heart with a rifle?" I asked. I remembered that rifle; long ago, in our old house in the country, my father and I used to go out in the big field behind the house and shoot targets. We would lie in the grass, and he showed me how to slide back the bolt and put the bullet in and lock it into place, balancing on my elbows to steady the gun. I remembered lining up the sights, squeezing the trigger, the gun's small jump as it went off, the satisfying click of the bolt as I released it to let the spent golden shell spring out. When we went to collect the targets they were pockmarked with small holes, some wildly isolated at the outskirts of the black concentric rings, but mostly clustered at the center; we both had good aim. Would you ever use it for hunting? I asked him.

No, he said. Once as a boy I shot a rabbit, and it was so terrible that I decided I'd never kill anything again.

Then why do you have the gun?

For protection, he said.

"A rifle?" my mother asked, surprised. "Why would he use a rifle?"

"You think he went out and bought another gun?" I didn't

agree with her that he did it in the impulse of a moment, but this amount of premeditation was too much for me.

"He had another gun."

"He did?"

"A little one. A handgun. He'd had it for ages. He bought it in the summer of 1964. The summer of Watts. When everyone was saying there were going to be riots all over suburbia."

"But that's crazy," I said.

My mother shrugged. "It didn't seem so crazy, back then."

I looked up and smiled in the direction of the kitchen. "You must be Annette," I said, in a loud voice.

"That's right," Annette said, smiling sadly at me. She had long pale hair that lay like yellow satin ribbon on either side of her chest.

"Well," I recited in polite exaggerated singsong, "it's nice finally to meet you." We laughed.

"I'm sorry about your father," she said. "He was a lovely man."

"Thank you," I said. "What are you making?"

"Soup."

"Chicken soup," Ted said. "Your father's chicken soup, as a matter of fact. He made it for me a few weeks ago when I had the flu, and I asked him for the recipe."

"Fresh dill," I said.

"That's the secret," said Ted. The phone rang, and Ted answered it and brought it over to my mother. "Eric Parsons calling you back."

"Who's Eric Parsons?" I asked.

"The lawyer," he said.

I went and stood at Ted's kitchen window while my mother talked to the lawyer. I looked out at the hillside where his back garden was. When I'd come here at Christmas my mother had walked me up the hill through the garden, which was studded with dozens of metal rings supported by wires, like haloes in a school Christmas play. Peonies, my mother had told me. Ted's put in thirty-seven different varieties of peonies.

I didn't know there were thirty-seven different varieties, I'd said.

Well, apparently there are. Even Daddy's impressed, she said.

The garden now looked exactly as it had that day: a bare rocky brown hillside caked with ice, each peony waiting invisibly beneath its frozen glittering cage.

The floor trembled under my feet; my mother was walking into the kitchen, replacing the phone in its cradle.

I turned to look at her. "What did he say?"

"He was appalled. That's what he kept saying, *I'm appalled*. Fuck him."

"You need a different guy," Ted told her. "Call my guy. He's terrific."

"Who is he to be so fucking appalled?" my mother said.

"He was appalled," Ted said. "Gee, that's too bad."

"Fuck him," I said.

"Yeah, fuck him," said Annette.

We went on like that; for a few moments Ted's kitchen was filled with "appalled"s and "fuck"s, murmured over and over until all of us were smiling, as if at some distorted message in a game of Telephone.

Finally I said, "But did he have any advice?"

"Advice?" my mother said. "What about?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Call my guy," said Ted.

The doorbell rang and Ted went to answer it. My sister came into the kitchen. She was carrying a suitcase. Her face was puffy and her eyes were red; I stared at her. She and I hugged, for a long time; I didn't want to let go of her; I didn't want to start talking again.

"You poor girls," my mother announced. "Your father."

"Well," I said, releasing my sister. "Your husband."

"But *your father*," she said. She sat down in the striped armchair and pulled the blanket up over her lap.

Lydia said, "What happened?"

My mother told her. *He got up, showered, shaved, and dressed for work. . . .* She put in all the details I'd prodded her on before—the handgun, the blood on his chest, his feet crossed at the ankles. When she finished, Lydia was crying again, soundlessly. My mother stroked her arm and got up and went into the bathroom.

Lydia whispered to me, fiercely, her eyes glittering, "He brought her the coffee."

"I know," I said. I told her what I'd thought before, that it was like the dog bringing the slippers.

"No," she said, "it was like 'fuck you.'"

When my mother came back, Lydia said, "Was there a note?"

“A note?” my mother said. “No, there wasn’t any note.”

“On the desk?” I said.

“I didn’t look,” she said. “The desk was a mess. You girls don’t know. He hadn’t cleaned it for months. I used to say to him, Let me help you, I’ll sit down with you and we’ll spend an evening sorting it out. But he wouldn’t.” Her voice was rising. “He was so damned secretive. He never told me anything. I was always saying to him, I really should know what we have and where it is. What if something happens to you? But he never would tell me. You know what he said finally? He said he was afraid that if I knew, I would leave him. Can you believe it? He thought if I knew where the money was I would take it and leave.”

Lydia looked at me and I could tell we were both thinking the same thing: Maybe there wasn’t any money. Maybe that’s what he didn’t want you to find out, maybe that’s why he thought you would leave.

“That desk is such a mess I don’t know how anyone could find anything there!” She was screaming now. “Oh, my God. You think there was a note? You think he left me a note and I didn’t see it?” She looked at me and at Lydia. “What if the police find it and read it? What could it say?”

“I thought Monday for the funeral,” my mother said. We were back in our places: she in the armchair, without the blanket now, Lydia and I on what looked like ancient wooden milking stools that Ted had produced from somewhere.

“Daddy wouldn’t want a funeral,” I said.

My mother shook her head, blinking. “Yes, he did,” she said. “He wanted them to play the Mozart *Requiem*.”

“Well, we’re not having the Mozart *Requiem*,” I said loudly. Then, trying to explain, “If we do anything, we have to make it something we can get through, and that’s something I couldn’t bear.”

“I agree,” said Lydia.

“I mean, Ma, whatever he may have said to you about wanting a funeral, these circumstances—”

My mother cut me off. “He’s dead. Never mind how. A lot of people are going to miss him.”

“I know that, but—”

“There’s a Unitarian church on Diamond Rock Road. It’s very

simple inside. Daddy would have liked it. We could do it there, Monday morning."

"You mean with a coffin and everything?" My voice was rising, beginning to shake.

"No," my mother said calmly; it seemed we were taking turns, the three of us, being the calm one. "He wanted to be cremated."

I took a breath and tried to match her tone. "We can wait until spring, then, to scatter the ashes. We could do it in Long Island Sound, where he sailed."

Lydia said, "I don't want him in the water. There needs to be a place."

"There's an old graveyard up on Bald Hill," said my mother.

"Why?" I said. "Why does there need to be a place?"

"So we can visit it," said Lydia. "I want to be able to take my kids there."

"Well, I'm not going to visit it," I said.

"Don't," said Lydia.

"If he's dead then let him be gone," I said.

My mother put her hand on my wrist, fingering the end of my sleeve. "We'd better start calling people. Get Ted to give you some paper. We'll make a list."

The paper Ted gave me had a tiny red pineapple printed at the top, with his initials underneath: EMT. I wrote down names with a black felt tip pen: my mother's brother and his wife and their grown children. Her other brother. My father's business partner. "Let's see, who else," my mother said.

"Kurt," said Lydia.

"Kurt?" My mother frowned. "God, I forgot about him. I suppose you have to call him."

"Of course we do; he's Daddy's *brother*," I said, annoyed; I'd forgotten about him too, but my hand, writing his name, was shaking. "You really should be the one to call him."

"No, no, you do it. I can't deal with him now," she said.

"Well," I said. I looked at my watch. It was nearly three o'clock. He must be gone by now, I thought, they must have finished and taken him away. I didn't want to make the phone calls; there was something limbo-like about sitting there with my mother and sister in Ted's warm kitchen. My father was sort of dead, but not all the way yet; we hadn't told anyone in the family; something might still change.

"Use the phone in the study, upstairs," my mother was saying. "Ted will show you where."

All these studies, I thought. I said, "Do you want me to tell people how?"

"What do you mean?" my mother asked.

"I mean when they ask what happened. Should I say it was suicide, or should I say a heart attack or something?" Suddenly I was trying to pick a fight: she would say heart attack, and I would argue for telling the truth. Lydia, I thought, would back me up.

"Why should we hide it?" my mother said.

"I just thought—you know, because Daddy was so private—"

"We've got nothing to be ashamed about," said my mother, and Lydia said:

"If he hadn't been so private, maybe he'd still be alive."

My husband came with me to make the phone calls. I let him do the talking, pulling people out of meetings. It's an emergency, he said.

Yes, it is, I thought; and there was something of a relief in hearing him say it. This was not a debatable emergency, like calling the pediatrician on a Sunday morning when Robert had a fever; this was emergency in its starkest, purest form. We had a perfect right to interrupt meetings, to shock people out of the ordinary progress of the day. I liked it that they came to the phone a little ruffled, a little worried, but unprepared for what Peter was about to tell them. I listened to him explaining over and over that my father was dead and how it had happened, and I felt a startling calm sense of power that was almost a thrill, as my cousins and aunts and uncles went over the road that I had already traveled that morning. They were innocent, then they were shocked and saddened; they were out on that rainy windy road but I was farther along than they.

"What did they say?" I asked him after each call was over.

He told me: They were upset.

No, no, I wanted the details. How did their voices sound, what words had they used exactly? They were mobilizing, he reported. One cousin would drive up from the city tomorrow, another was leaving the office right now to go break the news to his parents, my mother's eldest brother Paul and his wife. Paul was sick, he had heart disease; he and Irene had adored my father, and my

cousin thought someone had better tell them the news in person. Good, I said, pleased to set so much in motion. Things were happening, people were scurrying, waves were rippling out from the spot where the stone had hit the water.

The sky was getting dark behind the bare tree branches at Ted's study window. The lights of the rooms below made pale wedge shapes on the frozen stones of the terrace. The day was receding; the last daylight my father had seen would soon be gone.

"Who else?" I asked.

"Just Kurt."

"Try him at the theater." I flipped through my mother's black address book and found the number. I stood up and wandered around Ted's study while Peter dialed. The silvery barn-board walls were covered with photos of Ted when he was younger, chiseled and aloof, leaning on a Jeep, running on a beach. A series in black-and-white, Ted standing in jeans and a white shirt against a crumpled paper backdrop. My mother had told me he'd been a model, when he first got to New York. He must have been gorgeous, she'd said. You know Montgomery Clift? That's how he looks, in those pictures.

"Oh," said Peter, "well do you know where I can reach him?"

At the top of Ted's stairs, in a corner, there was a stair-climbing machine. I went over to it and held onto one of its chrome railings. There was a lamp next to it; I switched it on and the room was filled with stark yellow light, throwing huge sudden shadows on the eaves high above.

Peter hung up. "He's not at the theater. They said he's probably on his way in, for tonight's performance."

"Try him at home anyway, just in case." Let him not be there, I thought, please make him be out. But I heard my husband say, "This is Peter Cole. . . . Cole. I'm married to your niece Paula? Bill's daughter? I wanted to let you know that Bill died this morning." Then, "Yes, he's dead. . . . No, nothing like that. He killed himself. . . . no, with a gun. . . . no, it was instantaneous. He was dead when Lee found him. . . . yes, this morning. . . . around seven." There was a long silence; then Peter said, "Kurt. I know. . . . I know. Kurt." He took the phone away from his ear and covered the receiver. "He wants to talk to you." I shook my head, and walked quickly to the top of the stairs. "She can't talk right now. Well, because it's been a long day, and everyone is tired."

His voice rose. "I know, but we didn't call *anyone*. There's been a lot to do, and—Kurt. Kurt, calm down." His voice was rough, angry. I started down the stairs. Behind me Peter said, "No. In the heart."

When I got downstairs, the police were there. Three of them, two wearing uniforms and one in a khaki raincoat. "You're the older daughter?" one of them said to me. "Do you mind coming with us into the other room?"

We went through the kitchen into Ted's living room. There was a fire going in there, too. I sat on a green velvet couch. The man in the raincoat sat down on a spindly wooden chair and asked me to tell him my address, whether I was married, how many children I had. He said, "Can you think of any reason why your father might have done this?"

"Well, he was having some business problems," I said.

"What kind of problems?"

"He was in the machinery business, and they weren't selling any machines. It's a low-volume, high-end business—if you sell one or two a year, you're fine, but if you don't. . . ."

One of the uniformed policemen was sitting in another spindly chair, writing down what I said on a small yellow pad. The third policeman wasn't there; he must have stayed in the kitchen.

"And there were some product liability suits," I said. "Some people had gotten hurt, using the machines. They didn't use them right, they were careless and they got hurt."

"Uh-huh," said the detective. His tone was neutral, but it made me scrutinize my own words; I was telling him what my father had told me but now it sounded defensive, rationalizing.

"Anyhow," I said, "my father kept having to go to court and testify, and I think it was very upsetting to him. I think he took it personally."

"Right," he said, "your mother told us the same thing. How was the marriage?"

I folded my hands together and looked past him, at Ted's big black piano topped with silver-framed photographs.

"Fine," I said.

"They didn't fight or anything?"

"Nope," I said. In the corner of my eye I saw the other policeman silently making notes.

"Never?"

"Well, sometimes," I said. "But it was always—like she would say, I'll clean up the kitchen, and he'd say: But you made dinner, let me clean up the kitchen. And she'd say, But you've been working all day, you're tired, let me do it." This particular fight was dredged up from my childhood; it had happened probably twenty years ago, but the policeman didn't have to know that. I looked at him and smiled: See how benign?

He didn't smile back at me. I took a breath and said quickly: "But there's something else, something my mother doesn't know. There was a loan, a big one, not for the machinery business but for this other company he had, with three other guys. They took out this big bank loan and they'd been making the payments, but then they missed a couple of payments. It wasn't their fault—the bank didn't bill them for a couple of months so they stopped paying, but they would have paid if they'd realized—" I stopped myself; both policemen were looking at me curiously, with that same solemn pity I thought I'd seen when I'd told them about the product liability suits. I clasped my hands together more tightly. "Anyway," I said, "a few weeks ago the bank called the loan."

It was as though we all let out our breaths, invisibly, silently. A collective sigh was in the room. *Oh, dear*, it whispered, and at the same time, *Thank God. Now we can say: We know why he did it.*

"And how big was this loan?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. But I know it was big. And I know he didn't tell my mother."

We sat and the uniformed policeman wrote. How gentle these policemen were; they probably had families. They would go home tonight and someone would ask, How was your day?

"Should I tell my mother now, do you think, or would it be too much for her?" I asked.

"That's up to you," the detective said. "When was the last time you talked to your father?"

"Two days ago. Wednesday night."

"What did you talk about?"

I looked away from him, over his shoulder, blindly. For the first time that day, I felt as though I might cry. But it occurred to me as an idea, rather than a sensation—huh, I might be going to cry—and the instant it surfaced, it was gone.

"Not much," I said. "I was planning to grow some roses this summer, so I was asking him for advice."

“He sounded normal?”

“Oh, if anything, he sounded better than usual. Sometimes we’d have these long conversations but he didn’t talk, whenever I asked him a question he’d turn it around so we were talking about me instead of him. But Wednesday I asked him how he was, and he said, ‘Lousy,’ but he said it in this kind of, I don’t know, cheerful funny kind of way. I asked him what he meant, and he said, ‘Oh, I spilled Mom’s coffee all over myself going up the stairs this morning, and the day was just downhill from there.’ ” I smiled at the policeman: You see how elegant, the way he just laughed at all these disasters? And I felt the smile dissolving, falling off my face.

“That’s all? He spilled the coffee?”

“Well, but there was more than that. The business stuff.” I frowned. Literal, this fellow, isn’t he? The thought came to me in my father’s voice, the faintly English-accented one he used for irony and puns; for an instant it was as though my father and I were sharing a joke.

“But nothing specific? What else did you talk about?”

“Oh. My son. We talked about him for a while, and my father said he thought Peter and I were doing a wonderful job with him. . . .” I looked at the piano again. That was the goodbye, I thought.

The policemen were getting up. The quiet one had shut his pad. I said, “Is he—I mean, have you finished up at our house?”

“No, not yet. It shouldn’t be much longer. We’ll let you know.”

“And do you know of any—is there some kind of cleaning service we could get in there tonight? And I want that chair out of the house before my mother goes back.”

The one in the raincoat said, “We can remove the chair, but I don’t think you’ll need a cleaning service.” He cleared his throat. “It’s really not that bad.”

We stood for a moment, looking at the floor.

The detective said, “We asked your mother if there was a woman friend we could call, you know, someone to be with her now. But she seemed to want Mr. Tyson.”

“Uh-huh,” I said.

In the next room my mother was screaming. “Oh, my God! Oh, my God!” I pushed open the door and ran in. “Oh, my God!” my mother cried, holding out one hand to me and pointing with the

other at the third policeman, the one who had stayed in the kitchen. "He was on the *woodchipper* murder!"

"What's the woodchipper murder?" I asked.

"It's the *book* I've been reading. You know how I like those true crime books? I just finished it. The man who killed his wife and then put her body into the woodchipper. It happened just north of here. And I just remembered why his name was familiar—he was the policeman in the book!"

I nodded politely at the policeman, who looked down and shifted his weight from one foot to the other and then back again.

When the police left, I felt tired, or disappointed: I could not tell exactly what the feeling was, the loss of momentum, perhaps. I had felt it briefly when Jerry drove away from the hotel with my son, and again toward the end of Peter's phone calls, and again when the detective had finished asking me questions. It was a dim awareness that the task at hand was completed, that the anticipated relief had not come. There was no obvious next step. The day had gone along as a procession of things that needed to be done; the prospect of the next task felt, oddly, like hope.

It was the dinner hour. Ted and Annette were setting the long dining room table with heavy peasantry ceramic dishes, blue and white checked placemats, blue linen napkins. My mother was ladling the soup into a big flowered tureen; Peter was mixing a salad.

"What is this, a dinner party?" Lydia muttered to me in the little passageway outside the kitchen.

"Ted's been cooking all day. It's his way of trying to help," I said, but her face was dark and her red eyes glittered.

I went into the dining room and stood by the table.

"That's where your father spilled the wine on New Year's Eve," Ted said from behind me. I looked down at a dark splotch on the porous blond wood of the table; I put my hand on the stain.

At dinner my mother and Ted did witty repartee, as though their dialogue were being documented—Look at us, we're doing witty repartee! Lydia's face was frozen. Annette lit candles, handed dishes, silent and beautifully grave, a Vermeer maidservant. I couldn't eat, but occasionally I joined in the talk, casting apologetic glances at my sister: I know it's horrible, to talk and

laugh, but Mom and Ted are trying so hard, and if this is how they want to play it, then it's our job to help them out.

We were still at the table when the phone rang; it was Kurt.

"You'd better talk to him," I told my mother. "He was upset before, when it was Peter he talked to. I think he feels shut out."

"I can't help how he feels," my mother said, but she got up and took the phone from Ted and went with it into the kitchen.

The rest of us cleared the table. I put down a stack of plates on the counter and heard her say, "No!" a couple of times; then she said, "Kurt, I don't think you understand, we don't *have* the body, the police have it, I don't know where it is." Then: "Kurt, there's nothing to see, this is not a body you'd want to see. . . . Kurt. No. Kurt." She held the phone away from her. "He wants to drive up here tonight."

"Tell him no," I said.

"He hung up," said my mother.

"Call him back," I said. "I'll talk to him."

"Don't bother," she said. "He won't come."

"What if he does?"

She shrugged. "He doesn't know where to find us."

"Mom," said Lydia. "Let's at least call him back and tell him where we are."

"He won't come," my mother said again. "He always gets lost. He always says he's coming—Christmas, Daddy's birthday—and then he doesn't show up."

"This is different," Lydia said.

"He's hysterical," said my mother.

"It's his brother," I said.

"Well, it's my husband," she said.

A few minutes later I went upstairs and tried calling Kurt at the theater, but they said he had just gone onstage. I left a message saying that I hoped he would drive up and see us tomorrow. But all that night I wondered if he was in his car, driving along dark, frozen, unmarked roads, winding up by blind instinct at my parents' house, banging at the door.

"So, should we tell her about the loan?" I asked Peter. We were back upstairs, whispering, in Ted's study.

"I don't know," he said. "There's nothing she can do about it, tonight. It might just upset her."

"It might make her feel better, to know that's why he did it."

"We don't even know how much it is." He took a deep breath.

"We need to call Jerry."

"Maybe we should."

I stood beside Peter as he made the call. I listened as he told Jerry that it wasn't a heart attack; it was suicide. He said: "We know there was a loan that you guys took out to start the door company. Bill told Paula that the bank had called the loan—is that right? We need to know how much it was."

I pushed a piece of paper under Peter's hand, and gave him a pencil from the silver cup on Ted's desk. I waited for the figure to appear: millions, a number that would throw my mother into debt, that would clang like a giant bell tolling, a number that would explain everything. I watched as Peter wrote down: 220,000.

I said out loud: "His share?"

Peter shook his head and wrote down: The whole thing.

I divided in my head by four, for the four partners in the door company. I said, "You mean his share was fifty-five thousand?" I wrapped my arms around myself; I went into the next room, Ted's bedroom. I sat down on the big bed, which was the only piece of furniture in the room. The walls were lined with built-in drawers and cupboards, one of which gaped open to show a row of hanging shirts, grouped by color. I saw white shirts, blue ones, striped ones, dark plaid flannels. Peter came in. I said, "We could have given him that. We could have taken out a second mortgage and written him a check. *He* could have taken out a second mortgage. My God. *Jerry* could have covered it, without blinking an eye."

"Maybe that's what he was afraid of, that Jerry would have to cover it," said Peter. His face was white. "Maybe he was ashamed at having gotten Jerry into the deal."

"I thought when we knew how much the loan was, we'd understand," I said. "All day I've been thinking that was the reason," I said.

"Maybe it was," Peter said again.

I stood up. "Fifty-five thousand? That doesn't explain anything." I began to walk around the room; I slammed the cupboard door shut. "Peter! That is not a reason."

"Sssh," said Peter, coming toward me with his arms out. I ducked away from him.

He said, "Should we tell your mother?"

I shrugged. "Sure."

"There's something else," he said. "Something the police told me. There was a note. Well, not a note exactly."

"What do you mean?"

"Something on the desk. An envelope. He'd written your mother's name on it."

"What was in it?"

"I'm not clear exactly. Financial information. A list of bank accounts. Should I tell your mother?"

"I don't know," I said. I went over to the window, saw my own reflection, turned away. Behind us, in the study, the phone was ringing. "I want this day to be over," I said. "I want things to stop happening."

"I know," he said. Then: "So, should we tell her?"

I said, "Well, now she'll know what she has and where it is."

He moved to leave the room. I said, "Wait," and I stood for a moment on Ted's threadbare Oriental carpet, trying to purge myself of meanness before I went downstairs.

Ted and Lydia were trying to talk my mother out of going home for the night.

"What are you making such a big deal for?" she was saying. "I don't have any problem going back there."

"Sleep here tonight," Ted said.

"Why?" my mother asked. "I have to go back there sometime."

Lydia looked at me.

"Tomorrow," I said. "Not tonight."

"I'll stay here with you," Lydia said.

"We can't go back there anyway," I said. "The police are there."

"They're finished," said my mother. "They just called, to tell us they're leaving."

"Okay," I said slowly. And I felt another, final, surge of organizational energy. "Peter, you go over there and pack a bag for my mother. Get a nightgown and her toothbrush and—well, Mom, you tell him what you need."

"I'll go with you," Ted said.

"Oh, that's all right," said Peter.

"No, let him go with you," I said. "Mom, give Ted a list." I pulled Peter into the back hall with me and whispered to him, "Make sure the chair is out of there. The police told me they would get rid of it, but make sure they did. And take some paper towels and some, I don't know, Windex or Fantastik or something. All right?"

"All right," he said, and I could see that he knew what I meant, but I didn't want to take any chances.

"Get rid of all the blood," I said. "I mean it. Check the baseboards, the stairs. They probably took him out in one of those bags, but check anyway."

"I will," he said.

Annette had finished the kitchen and gone to bed. My mother and Lydia and I sat by the dying fire, waiting for Ted and Peter to come back.

"He always took such good care of me," my mother said sleepily. "Even today. Did you hear about the list he left?"

"How did you know about that?"

"The police told me," she said. "Do you think he sat there this morning, making the list?"

We didn't answer her.

"No," she said, "this morning he acted in the moment. He must have made that list some time ago, and this morning he just put it into an envelope for me and left it on the desk." She looked at me. "Are you planning to stay here tonight?"

"Of course," I said.

"It's just that I don't think Ted has enough beds. There's the little guest room down here, for me, and then Lydia can sleep on the couch."

"Oh," I said. The thought of going back to my parents' house frightened me; I did not want to be there, sleepless, where my father had slept the night before; I did not want to be there tomorrow morning, watching the clock creep around to the last minute of his life. But I also knew that if I went there I would be as close to him as it was still possible to be.

"And you must want to see the baby," my mother said. "You could drive there tonight and still be back here in time for breakfast."

"Drive where?" I asked.

"To Elizabeth and Jerry's, of course," she said.

She was right. I could get in the car and drive to Peter's parents' house, an hour away; they would take care of me. I could be someplace safe for a few hours and then come back to all this, because I had that baby fifty miles away: a perfectly honorable excuse, a furlough, a flight from responsibility disguised as maternal duty.

There was a noise at the front door, and I got up and went out to intercept Ted and Peter in the hall.

"Was the chair gone?" I asked.

"It was out on the front porch," Peter said.

"That's what they call taking it away?"

"We're going back first thing in the morning, with the truck," Ted told me. "I'll get rid of it."

"Before my mother sees it," I said.

"Of course," he said. He was holding my mother's overnight bag; I took it from him and opened it up. Inside there was a pale green nylon nightgown, something I had never seen my mother wearing. I took it out and unfolded it; it was narrow and silky, nearly transparent. I looked at Peter. "Where did you find this?"

"In her dresser."

"Was it in a satin case?"

"Yes."

"You can't let her see this. This is the nightgown she wore on her wedding night, she's saved it all these years, she showed it to me once."

"Oh, God," he said.

The three of us looked at each other, and the horror on their faces made me, suddenly, want to laugh.

I crumpled up the nightgown and stuffed it into the pocket of Peter's jacket. "Just tell her you couldn't find a nightgown."

"I'll lend her something," said Ted. "A shirt, or something."

I said to Peter: "Listen, the plan is for us to drive up to your parents'. We can see Robert and then come back tomorrow morning."

"All right," he said, and his face mirrored my own relief.

In the car, driving along the dark roads, Peter said: "So did you tell your mother about the loan?"

I shook my head in the darkness. "I'll tell her tomorrow. Or the next day." Then I asked: "Was there any blood?"

I looked sideways at him. His face was still and tight, his eyes on the road. "A little," he said. "Not much."

"But you—"

"I got it."

"Did you turn on the light and check really carefully? Because—"

"I got it all."

"Where was it?"

He glanced at me, then back to the road. "On the baseboard. A little on the closet door."

"And the police were gone, when you got there?"

He hesitated. "No, they were still there."

"My father? Was my father—"

"No, they'd taken him away. There was just a van, I guess it was a crime-scene van, still in the driveway."

"Did you go inside it?"

"Yes, for a minute."

"What were they doing in there?"

"Drinking coffee, filling out reports." His voice grew softer. "It was sort of cozy. Like a little ship."

We didn't talk, then, for several minutes. I thought of the police, in their little lighted ship in front of the dark, empty house.

"Kurt wasn't there, was he?" I asked suddenly.

"No," Peter said, surprised.

We were on the highway now, driving fast, passing other cars. I tried not to think of my father lying in the back of some police conveyance, traveling over these same roads to wherever they were taking him. I tried to think of Elizabeth and Jerry waiting up for us, in their big calm house, with the baby sleeping upstairs. I looked out the window and ahead of us I saw a white Toyota Camry, exactly like my father's car, in the left-hand lane, just enough ahead of us so that I couldn't see the driver.

"Can you go a little faster?" I said to Peter. He glanced sideways at me, and then we went a little faster. But ahead of us the white car was speeding up too, as if it sensed that we were chasing it. I watched it pulling farther and farther away. And I saw that no matter how fast we went, the white car would always go faster; we would never catch up to it, I would never know who was inside.

HAROLD FROMM

My Science Wars

Although it was in the early eighties when I began to feel a growing disaffection with the radicalized academic left, a decisive nausea-inducing body blow was administered by the *PMLA* of January 1989. In that infamous issue appeared a letter signed by twenty-four feminist academics attacking the eminent Shakespeare scholar Richard Levin, for “Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy,” which had appeared in *PMLA* the year before. Levin’s essay, the work of a well-tempered, open-minded, and liberal supporter of many radical reforms in the academy, was a penetrating critique of the feminist identity politics that were trying to wrest Shakespeare into the persona of a feminist scourge of sexism and patriarchy. Levin’s temerity in taking on the distortions of identity politics was threatening enough, but his Enlightenment style and Swiftian wit, which he brilliantly deployed to dismantle the tendentious and self-serving hermeneutics of the “dictatorship of virtue” (a phrase I borrow here from Richard Bernstein) that constitutes avant-garde millenarianism in the U.S. academy, served further to inflame the hypersensitive skins of his holier-than-thou critics, who brook no criticism because they are already in possession of the absolute truth they deride in all other cases. Three gems from that rather lengthy letter beg to be quoted, although they cannot begin to convey the noxiousness of the whole:

We argue that gender difference is a historically specific cultural construct with diverse forms and representations and damaging consequences for characters in plays, subjects in the Renaissance, and for us—and Levin—today. . . . The view that “science” and “rationality” can comprehend “complex factors in human development” without the messy intrusion of “gender and ideology” is an Enlightenment dream, long since turned to nightmare. . . . We wish to know why, in view of the energetic, cogent, sophisticated theoretical debate that is currently taking place within and among schools of Renaissance criticism, *PMLA* has chosen to print a tired, muddled, unso-

phisticated essay that is blind at once to the assumptions of feminist criticism of Shakespeare and to its own.

If ever a critical essay had been radically (in all senses) misrepresented in the interest of identity politics, Levin's piece on feminist thematics in Shakespeare was certainly a locus classicus. Far from being tired and unsophisticated, Levin wrote then and continues to write now with vitality, wit, insight and precision. This misbegotten attempt to badmouth and silence him was a performance of the radical academy at its "final solution" worst. (Academic final solutions don't require gas chambers, just lots of gas.) And when I saw the moral character of the opposing sides, I asked myself then as I regularly do now: If forced to make a choice in delegating power, into whose hands would I be willing to put myself? In cases like this, the question is hardly even worth asking.

Only a few years later I was invited to contribute an essay to a collection dealing with Gerald Graff's pedagogy of "teaching the conflicts." Rereading a number of his essays that formed the basis for the collection, I was struck by Graff's democratic and egalitarian insistence that postmodern literary theory, far from being "obscure, technical and abstruse, and therefore too advanced or esoteric for the average college or high school student of literature," could be made perfectly intelligible and accessible because "all teaching involves popularization." Yet when well-educated critics like David Lehman and Robert Alter ventured to write books highly critical of the avant-garde canon, Graff brushed them off as "pretty bizarre" and "totally ignorant." And the inevitable question for me was, "Easy for students but impossible for David Lehman and Robert Alter?" "One begins to fear," I added, "that what Graff really wants is not conversation or diversity, but *absolute conformance and identity*."¹

Now, in 1996, I witness the fortress mentality of the culture wars reaching some sort of apogee in its latest phase: *Science Wars*.² This, the title of the Spring/Summer issue of *Social Text*, was generated as a response to *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left*

¹ *Teaching the Conflicts: Gerald Graff, Curricular Reform, and the Culture Wars*, ed. by William E. Cain (New York & London, 1994), pp. 74, 76.

² *Social Text*, 46-47, Vol. 14, Nos. 1 and 2, Spring/Summer 1996. Most of the essays in this issue of *Social Text*, along with some new ones, were subsequently published as a book in the fall of 1996 by Duke University Press. According to the editors, Alan Sokal's essay was never intended to be included in the book version because of its marginality to the theme of science wars.

and Its Quarrels with Science, by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt, published in 1994 and still producing a lot of heat. Gross, a biologist at the University of Virginia, and Levitt, a mathematician at Rutgers, are the designated inheritors of the mantle of Richard Levin, and the sixteen contributors to this volume are more or less the brothers and sisters of the twenty-four signatories of the protest letter to *PMLA*, though the effect is not quite so toxic, despite a few pretty dotty moments. Indeed, Gross and Levitt, as scientists who speak the issues and languages of the humanities with exemplary sophistication as men of wide-ranging culture, write an Enlightenment prose rivaling Levin's in its clarity, insight, and barbed wit. And its relatively measured coolness, like Levin's, has so enraged some of their respondents in science studies that *they* have called *Gross and Levitt* "hysterical." Add to all this the now notorious parody of science studies (unwittingly accepted by the editors) by Alan Sokal, a physicist at NYU, which rounds out this issue of *Social Text*, and you've got the makings of a postmodern reign of terror. "Off with their heads!" resounds from every side, and what should be sage metaphysical lucubration begins to sound like the pandemonium set off by the rape of the lock.

Although a number of reviewers were scandalized that Andrew Ross and the other editors behind *Science Wars* were unable to recognize Sokal's contribution as a hoax—and a few overheated critics on the right seemed to think it portended a takeover by the barbarian hordes and the collapse of Western civilization as we know it—there is no obvious reason why Ross and the others *should* have recognized it, since it sounds remarkably similar to much of what is written in cultural studies. (That was the point, wasn't it?) Nor should one assume that the rest of this issue of *Social Text* is an unmitigated disaster—because it's not. Although it has its share of loony tunes (as Stanley Aronowitz likes to say), as a specimen issue of an academic quarterly journal it could probably be defended as better than average. It's certainly not uninteresting. Still, even the best of the essays reveal that a substantial quantity of what passes for sense in cultural studies is indistinguishable from nonsense—and when the nonsense is the *right* nonsense, business can go on as usual, as Sokal's clever parody admittedly suggests. If this means there is something rotten in the state of cultural studies, so what else is new? There is plenty of rottenness elsewhere as well. Unfortunately, the

uproar provided more fuel to the fortress mentality, and Ross and Bruce Robbins wrote replies that won't add much to their reputations. Stanley Fish, the Arch-Jokester/Trickster of Academe (who just happens to be Executive Director of Duke University Press, the publisher of *Social Text*), wrote a sophisticatedly defensive (one is tempted to say "bankrupt") letter to the *New York Times*, complaining—of all things—that Sokal's joke wasn't funny. So again, what else is new?

Levitt and Gross's book impressed me with its liberal point of view and its defense of the basic reasonableness of science, even while acknowledging the errors and evils that flow from science's complicity with unbridled capitalist technology. That their critics denounce them as neoconservatives hardly carries much weight, since similar critics denounce Sokal as well, even though he taught math in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas and would appear to have impeccable leftist credentials. Nothing except absolute belief in the latest radical doctrines (which will be supplanted tomorrow by new ones) can placate a left that simultaneously believes there are no foundations for believing anything. Most of the quarrel between the two sides, however, stems from a misunderstanding that is reflected over and over again throughout the essays in *Science Wars*. Levitt and Gross are mainly concerned with the intellectual processes that lie behind the procedures of the sciences, that is to say, the type of rationality—whereas their critics are concerned with the undeniably catastrophic consequences that have followed from many scientific discoveries (while playing down the stunning benefits that have made us who we are, e.g., pampered bourgeois with the leisure to take sides in the science wars over latte, instead of spending the day gathering sticks for cooking dinner). The critics see the *uses* of the sciences as "socially constructed," as well as the choices of projects to be funded and the directions in which such fundings push research. These criticisms seem quite well founded and Levitt and Gross are generally in agreement with them. But however faulty Western "reason" may be, they nevertheless remind their critics that penicillin works just as well in Third World countries as it does here, so the "reason" that lay behind its discovery must have a genuine connection with the natural world and not be just a socially constructed convention of Western capitalist patriarchy.

Among other things, Levitt and Gross object to the notion that

feminist science employs a different “reason” from male science. When Evelyn Fox Keller in her biography of Barbara McClintock accuses biologists of using figures of speech that betray their masculine predispositions, like the term “master molecule” for DNA, Levitt and Gross reply that “DNA as ‘master molecule’ is shorthand for ‘initial information source,’ nothing more; it carries no implications of ‘dominance.’” Praising McClintock’s work, they add that “there is no convincing mark on it of femininity, as McClintock herself was the first to insist. Her closeness to the experimental material, her willingness to ‘listen to it,’ is characteristic of the work of some scientists and less so of others. There are no data suggesting that women scientists display the characteristic, in general, more often than do men.” One of the more absurd essays in *Science Wars* goes so far as to examine figures of speech in Levitt and Gross’s book itself in order to prove that they are just male sexists and can consequently be ignored as unreliable. But, again, if one were forced to put oneself into the hands of Sarah Franklin, its author, or those of Levitt and Gross, no sane person would choose to be at the mercy of what passes for “reason” in Franklin. There may be lots of reasons, but some are more reasonable than others.

Throughout their book, Levitt and Gross point out that even the most fanatical deep ecologists, even the most outraged AIDS protesters, rely on the reports and discoveries of the sciences about species, ozone, the greenhouse effect, AZT, plate tectonics, the age of the earth, etc., “issues that would be unknown and unknowable but for the accomplishments of professional science.” Knowledge of this type is not regarded as socially constructed even by protesters but as the best information available about the “real” world. It’s not as though Levitt and Gross believed that the sciences know the noumenal essence of the universe, but they do believe there is a “real” connection between the descriptions offered by the sciences and the way the universe is. That the act of knowing mediates between knower and known and is thereby perspectival is not the same thing as saying that nothing valid can be known about anything. “We simply observe that science is, as all the world’s experience clearly tells us, overwhelmingly the best trick we so far know for getting the upper hand against disease. And we *know* that the politicized, overtheorized ‘criticism’ that is our subject offers nothing at all in that direction. Its main effect has been to assure aspiring cultural

critics that they can play a significant role in combating AIDS without having to do anything so tiresome as, for instance, abandoning the joys of lit-crit for careers in medicine or molecular biology.”

Andrew Ross does not perform very well in *Science Wars*, neither as editor providing an introduction nor as contributor. His “A Few Good Species,” with its scattershot critiques of every passing whim and his congenital one-upmanship, finally comes to naught, a characteristic failing of excessive energy working on too little substance (or too much insubstance). In his general introduction, he gives his blessing to the blurring of the distinction between theoretical and applied science that permeates this volume as a whole, a distinction that a few contributors go so far as to disallow altogether. “Once it is acknowledged that the West does not have a monopoly on all the good scientific ideas in the world, or that reason, divorced from value, is not everywhere and always a productive human principle, then we should expect to see some self-modification of the universalist claims maintained on behalf of empirical rationality,” Ross writes. But to my mind the second part of this sentence has no logical connection with the first. “Empirical rationality” (if by this he means the rationality that guides empirical investigations) has no obvious connection with the disposition of the fruits of that rationality or the values that yield such fruits. But then Ross is a prolific rather than a precise thinker. He also complains about the undemocratic character of science, insofar as it fails to allow local constituents to have a say in the development of scientific knowledge (Would he approve of creation science being taught in the schools?), and he pretends, here as elsewhere (see my account of Ross in *The Hudson Review*, Volume XLIX, Number 2, Summer 1996), to great sympathy for “alternative forms of rationality,” such as New Age spiritualism and alternative medicines, but in a privileged “have” like him this is a familiar form of seemingly cost-free egalitarianism, a highbrow slumming, an inverted snobbery. If he were unfortunate enough to eat some half-baked chicken laced with salmonella, would he race away for a grand consult with Deepak Chopra or would he hie himself off to the Emergency Room? In a pinch, even an Andrew Ross is constructed (socially or otherwise) on a solid foundation of good sense. (I say this while acknowledging the value to science of citizen input and attention to alternative medicine.) And the recurring democratic-

egalitarian pretensions of Ross and others in this volume, with their Promethean fantasies of bestowing speech upon the inarticulate huddled masses, seem more like the narcissism of bemused intellectuals seeking allies than a realistic program of social amelioration. Everyone not born yesterday knows that the first utterance of newly empowered proletarians to fatuous ego-inflated intellectuals is inevitably, "Go screw yourselves."

Ross's final verdict is that, piqued by reduced government funding, scientists have begun a backlash against the badmouthings by the science-studies left for fear of losing their wonted perquisites. This may or may not be completely false, but it is far from being a convincing exculpation of the high jinks of certain practitioners of science studies. And in referring to the "shrill tone" of Levitt and Gross, Ross belies the experience of my own prose-attuned and music-oriented ear that has been listening for most of a lifetime to how people say the things they say. If Gross and Levitt are "shrill," what would Ross have to say about Sandra Harding, whose raving essay opens this Ross-authorized collection?

"It is ironic," she begins, "that the major criticism of the new social studies of science and technology from the antidemocratic right in fact provides yet more evidence for the value of these science studies." For me, "antidemocratic right" did not bode well for the level-headedness or credibility of this essay, especially when goofily reiterated in "the antidemocratic right's recent clarion calls for the citizenry to join in stamping out feminism," which reads like a parody from "Doonesbury." Nor was I heartened by "Democracy-advancing social movements . . . have argued that the natural and social sciences we have are in important respects incapable of producing the kinds of knowledge that are needed for sustainable human life in sustainable environments under democratic conditions." ("Democracy" has really hit the fan around here.) Harding, incredibly enough, is a professor of philosophy at the University of Delaware, which doesn't speak well for the current state of precise thinking amongst people who nowadays can pass as philosophers. Her first two footnotes defy credulity: "I use *antidemocratic right* and *democracy-advancing* movements or tendencies in a somewhat simplistic way throughout this discussion," surely the understatement of the year. And the second note offers yet another modification of her intemperate off-the-wall philosophizing: "Local knowledge systems . . . are by no means always more accurate and effective than modern

scientific knowledge, but sometimes they are." And sometimes professors of philosophy are hard to distinguish from idiots (but not always)! Why say stupid things in the first place if you are going to take them back in footnotes?

Writing like Harding's needs to be kept in mind when Stanley Aronowitz calls Alan Sokal "undereducated," when Andrew Ross calls Levitt and Gross "shrill," and when George Levine refers to Levitt and Gross's "hysteria" or calls their critique of science studies "unintelligent." But almost everything can be forgiven, even stupidity or mendacity, if you are a member of the club and play the right game of identity politics. After all, critics like Aronowitz, Ross, and Levine are apt to regard education as Althusserian state-supported ideologies, canons as repressive patriarchal power-ploys, and the idea of "what every American should know" as a lowbrow reactionary enterprise suited only to excommunicated literary scholars like E.D. Hirsch. What on earth, then, can they be driving at by using such "exclusive," "elitist" conceptions as "undereducated" and "unintelligent"? If education is just a state-supported power grab, true freedom would consist of being as "undereducated" as possible. Let the prize be awarded to Harding, not Sokal.

In reality, however, Harding gradually comes to her senses as her essay moves along. Once the obligatory pieties have been gotten through, a little space still remains to say a few "intelligent" things instead of frothing on like Newt Gingrich. "Different organizations of knowledge generate different illuminating representations of nature," so there is not just one grand version of rationality. This turns out to be her main theme, an eminently acceptable one, however familiar as "situated knowledge" in Donna Haraway and many other sources. I doubt if even those demons, Levitt and Gross, would have any quarrels here.

Steve Fuller's essay, "Does Science Put an End to History, or History to Science?," has its strengths as well as its problems. The thesis that "science" (i.e., scientific rationality) lacks any ultimate or unitary nature is bolstered by an account of the way in which the Japanese made use of Western technology while rejecting the epistemology and the Reason-with-a-capital-"R" that lay behind the history of science in the West. Yet even this superior narrative is compromised by its share of the equivocation and identity politics that permeate this collection. What is one to think of Fuller's candor or "intelligence" when—after alluding to Hertz,

Planck, Ostwald, and the Curies, a mostly male group—he refers to their generation as “the last to be trained as ‘the complete scientist,’ someone who could construct *her* [my emphasis] own theories”? Or when he refers to “physicists, chemists, and biologists” as “her”? The “dictatorship of virtue” can’t have it both ways—if the science establishment has systematically excluded women over the course of its history, how is it possible to refer to the generic scientist as “her”? Or when four out of five scientists just mentioned are male, how can one’s self-respect or sense of the ridiculous allow one to allude to them as “her”? How many mutually exclusive virtues is it necessary to pack into one little radical soul? Apparently, sexually exclusive language is allowable if the exclusion is politically correct, even if most male readers will not regard themselves as being addressed when they encounter female pronouns.

Although Hilary Rose, like many of the other contributors, clouds the distinction between scientific theories and social policies, she writes from a more nuanced British feminist position, able to acknowledge that “it does not follow that because scientific claims are socially shaped they are interchangeable with myths or even stories.” As a sociologist, furthermore, she argues that lay people, such as sheep farmers or people suffering from obscure illnesses, often have an expertise derived from specialist experience which can extend the knowledge of professional scientists. For closed professional ranks to ignore them would be detrimental not only to social needs but to the interests of the sciences themselves, a useful application of the often murky call of this collection for greater “democracy.”

Dorothy Nelkin’s elaboration of science studies’ critique of scientific rationality is a somewhat unpersuasive display of wounded innocence: “To some scientists this social constructivist approach appears to be a hostile attack on science, and they are responding aggressively. Indeed, their counterattack is remarkable for its emotionalism, hostility, moral outrage, and polemical tone.” Nelkin badly needs a reading of the letter from twenty-four “constructivist” Shakespeare feminists to Richard Levin to see emotionalism, hostility, and moral outrage in operation among her friends. And when she complains that “‘outsiders’ who study science are convenient scapegoats, and waging war is an easy way for scientists to avoid critical self-inquiry,” I would call her attention to the “polemical tone” of Gerald Graff and his

associates in cultural critique when they address the presumption of “outsiders” like David Lehman and Robert Alter for having opinions about deconstruction. But Nelkin, like the others in this volume, is more concerned to blur the distinction between scientific rationality (with a small “r”) and the social circumstances of the sciences than to be accurate. “Rather than organizing to confront the politics of the corporate state or the growing influence of religious fundamentalists,” scientists have organized to defend their turf, she complains. Surprise, surprise! Like Langdon Winner, who speaks of Levitt and Gross as “malicious,” Nelkin appears to think that when dogs bite back after being kicked in the face they ought to be disposed of as vicious.

The most clear-sighted and helpful essay in this volume is probably the one by Richard Levins (not to be confused with the aforementioned Shakespeare scholar, Levin). His “Ten Propositions on Science and Antiscience” attempts, with much success, to clarify the terms of the entire debate. Most analyses of science, he reports, either emphasize its objectivity while neglecting its mistakes and misuses, “or else they use the growing awareness of the social determination of science to reject its claims to any validity. They imagine that theories are unrelated to their objects of study and are merely invented whole cloth to serve the venal goals of individual careers or class, gender, and national domination.” I wish some of the other contributors to this volume had had a chance to read Levins before shooting their mouths off. Levins’ only puzzling remark occurs near the end: “All theories are wrong which promote, justify, or tolerate injustice.” Would two and two have to be five if four promoted injustice? And what is injustice, anyhow? Only today I read in the *New York Times* that new laws prohibiting female circumcision in Egypt are regarded as unjust by people who have been practicing it for centuries and want to continue that practice. How would Levins handle that one?

I pass over George Levine’s essay very quickly, dispirited by the arrogance and hauteur of his misrepresentations of Levitt and Gross. Implying what several others in this collection claim outright, that political correctness is mostly imaginary (while himself demonstrating its ongoing presence), this distinguished professor is content to sully his well-earned reputation as a literary scholar by traducing a pair of science scholars who come off as more dignified and trustworthy than he. Only at the end does he

manage a balanced, if gratuitous, assessment of Andrew Ross. Though why he should think Ross is more worthy of serious attention than Levitt and Gross I am unable to explain.

Stanley Aronowitz's substantial and measured essay concedes that "it is difficult to deny that science has produced impressive results: rockets do reach the moon; penicillin can treat syphilis," etc. His claim "is not that science is uninfluential, only that its discoveries themselves and its influence are not unimpeachable. The import of the new social studies of science is to have shown that none of these discoveries amounts to a steady march toward Truth." Agreed. (Would anyone with a brain disagree?) Yet to refer to science as "one story among many stories" is at the same time both correct and misleading: music, geography, sports are other stories that represent other areas of reality. But is science just one story among many with regard to, say, Christian Science? Evangelical religion (or even mainstream religion)? Creationism? Goddess worship? There remains the attempt, even in Aronowitz, to blur the distinction between the fruits of the sciences, the politics of the sciences, and the nature of scientific rationality (even with all its errors and messiness). This is the tendentious lint that science studies needs to pick out of its meliorist fabric and which, for now, leaves me with an insuperable problem:

Namely, that somehow, for all its pious mouthings of "democracy," the academic left has become a profoundly mendacious and totalitarian establishment, crushing all voices other than its own. It is the ugly mirror image of the radical right. I ask myself once more—whose hands would I be willing to put myself into? Andrew Ross's? Sandra Harding's? George Levine's? Bruce Robbins'? Would their protestations of democratic egalitarianism let me be myself and hold onto ideas different from theirs (as Levitt and Gross and Richard Levin so obviously would)? Or would they simply dismiss me as "an outsider," hysterical," "malicious," "unintelligent," "undereducated" and so forth, attempting to deprive me of a voice the way Stanley Fish caballed against the National Association of Scholars at Duke or the way the party-line crazies at the University of Texas tried to crush the opponents of the politically correct freshman composition text they were about to foist upon their students? If radical academia represents the best that today's democratic egalitarianism can offer, all I can say to them is, "Shove it!"

GEORGE WATSON

I Was Kingsley Amis

Or so I used to remind him, since I stood in for him in Swansea in 1958-9, taking his classes while he taught in Princeton for a year, on his first visit to the United States.

But that hardly matters. We were all Kingsley Amis, more or less, if born between two world wars, and there was a sense in which, as a great mimic, he was all of us. His novels spoke in our voice, and they looked like the first fiction that ever did. Now that he is dead, there is no pride in admitting that so consciously unflattering an author was our voice. In fact one often wished he was not. But there he was, from *Lucky Jim* (1954) onwards, the undeniable sound of the world we lived in, however much in our wilder yearnings we might have preferred to live in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead* or in the Paris of Ernest Hemingway.

I first met him in 1961, when he was about to become a colleague in Cambridge, but felt that I knew him already. That was because of his Swansea students, who in my year among them had always seemed conscious of the difference. *Lucky Jim* had been out for four years by the time I got to south Wales, and Amis looked to his students like a confident young talent of radical views and with an alarming gift for satire. Some of his colleagues thought so too. "I keep pretty quiet about my madrigals," I remember one of them saying, fond of her evenings with friends around her piano but apprehensive of what he might make of them, if he knew, in his next book. He had once appeared on a Swansea lecture-platform in a new suit, I was told, and when a student whistled in mock-admiration he made a full turn before his audience and said brightly "Like it?" He was not always credited by his colleagues with having read all the masterpieces, such as Dickens and Tolstoy, that he cuttingly damned or lightly dismissed, and his dedication to scholarship in general was suspect. His face was rubber in repose, and could suddenly

turn into somebody else, while his gift for other voices was uncanny.

That shows in his novels which, like Evelyn Waugh's, offer the sort of dialogue where the tone and accent can only fall in one way and in one place, so that you are forced to hear the sentences as you read them. It was as if he had a tape recorder built into his brain. The gift is a mystery. It cannot just be a matter of context, though context helps, since a first sentence has none, and he could manage it even there. I remember a whole classroom in an American university laughing as I read out the opening of *Lucky Jim*, where the first six words are dialogue—"They made a silly mistake, though. . . ." The reader instantly intuits the parched, pedantic voice of a middle-aged professor, and Amis even catches the trick of the absent-minded speaker who suddenly falls silent "as if some entirely different man, some impostor who couldn't copy his voice, had momentarily taken his place." So speech is self-mimicry, and people imitate themselves as they talk, and may even have to stop talking when they forget how to do it. Amis was about thirty when he wrote that. It is an extraordinary revelation about how the world looked to him and about how it is. It is not only actors who forget their lines. We forget them in life.

Amis was famous before he was middle-aged, and myths had begun to encrust his life before I knew him. Like other new novelists of the 1950s he was often supposed by journalists and academic critics to have had notably humble origins, and I recall an American collection called *The New University Wits* (1963), edited by Harry T. Moore, that spoke of a new underclass of British authors invading ancient English universities as an effect of the Butler Education Act of 1944. Not very plausible, when you consider that fiction has hardly been a profession for gentlemen in any age, that Oxford and Cambridge have always been socially mixed and that Amis, in any case, was admitted to Oxford in 1941. His father was an office clerk who worked for Colman's Mustard, which is neither grand nor humble, and Kingsley's early life in south London as an only child is said to have been cosseted. In *Stanley and the Women* (1984), a novel that outraged feminist opinion and was briefly banned in the United States, the hero calls himself "lower middle class, not working class" which, he says, is a "very important distinction." So it is. Like Iris Murdoch and John Wain, Amis owed nothing to the Butler Education Act

and was of middle-class origin, easily superior in birth to many Victorian novelists like Charles Dickens and H. G. Wells. There *was* no British social revolution after 1945, in any case, in or out of higher education, merely an orderly expansion of opportunities due to an expanding economy as well as to legislative change. Amis, it is true, was antiestablishment all his life. But there are plenty of bourgeois precedents for that.

His attitude to scholarship was opportunistic and equivocal. His brief academic career, first at Swansea and then at Cambridge, ended when he was forty-one. But *Lucky Jim*, though scornful of false intellectualism, is not unbalanced as a view of college life. Amis was sometimes thought of as hostile to scholarship, and it is true that he did not do any after Oxford failed to accept his thesis. But I sometimes felt, as a Cambridge colleague, that he was over-reverent of what scholars did. I recall his consulting me then on what can only have been an unrealistically erudite study of literary utopias, mostly forgotten works of the nineteenth century, and cannot regret he did not do it. He had already written *New Maps of Hell* (1960), a lively account of modern science-fiction and its readership, based on his Princeton classes, and it was in the contemporary and near-contemporary that he always excelled. Historical origins were hardly his thing. *The James Bond Dossier* (1965), again, shows his critical strength, being written while Ian Fleming lived, as an admiring tribute, and ending with the news of his death: "He leaves no heirs." That is like watching someone lay a wreath. Amis demanded to be entertained. He loved watching television, including lots of soap, and he always believed a book had to be as interesting as the best popular culture there is. No one, in his view, had a duty to be bored, and the dedication demanded of academic life left him in wondering awe.

Lucky Jim was a novel he came to think over-celebrated—"I've written other books, you know," he would say. It is about the rival claims of two worlds, the academic and the big-city money-market, and the market wins. Like Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe*, which appeared coincidentally at much the same time, it is often thought of as the start of the campus novel. In a way it is. But in attitude it belongs to an earlier age, like Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, before universities started to look exciting. They were something for a young man to try; but there was something monkish about wanting to stay in one, and real life is always

happening somewhere else. Amis' interest in the academic was never more than tentative. "Yes, I could stand this," I remember Philip Larkin reporting his saying as he sat in the senior common room of the University of Leicester, where Larkin taught soon after the war, sniffing the air and wondering if the life could be for him. He had married in 1949 and started a family; there could be no doubt about needing a job; and academe at least leaves you time to write. But why stay? Jim Dixon did not stay, in that over-successful novel, and Amis took the same road to London as Jim a decade later, in a case of nature imitating art. All he regretted about that past life, he used to say years later, was the occasional chance to talk about masterpieces. "There's something about that in *Paradise Lost*, isn't there?" he would say, suddenly imitating his own voice in the club, and then a friend's answering him: "Let's go in and have some lunch, shall we?"

Amis never wanted to be anything but a writer, and America, when he first visited it in 1958, impressed him not only as a land of milk and martinis but for its Writers on Campus. British universities seldom have them, and Amis never wanted to live anywhere but in England. *I Like It Here*, as he called one of his books, derisive as always of those who live abroad and not very comprehending of those who like going there. The dilemma was solved by the success of his books, which was just as well. Even in his Cambridge days, in 1961-3, he was a big spender, and by the 1960s he needed a lot of money, had it, and was not much interested in keeping it. From then on universities looked touchingly remote and endearingly boring, and he must often have wondered how he had ever put up with them. Cambridge, as he devastatingly remarked in an article called "No More Parades," written for *Encounter* on his resignation in 1963, is "the least damaging place in England in which not to be found funny." That makes it sound more like Evelyn Waugh's dim college in *Decline and Fall* than the gamey settings for power games and erotic adventures that figure in the novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge.

A radical is not universally loved and does not want to be, and Amis was always a radical, even when he came to call himself a conservative. Disconcertingly so. Born in London in 1922, he was a teenager in the heady days of the Popular Front and a Communist freshman at Oxford in 1941, where he refused,

however, to join the Socialist Club on the elevated grounds that he was a writer and an artist, and writers and artists do not join things. That sounds fearfully grand and impressively single-minded. Then he was called up, at the height of the war, which may have been his first douche of reality. I remember him telling how, on his first day in barracks, he looked around at the mass of soldiery, many of them plainly failing to qualify as bourgeois or proletarian, and thought to himself, as a young Marxist, "This doesn't apply." The class war, like the Second Coming, did not happen. It is an incident that casts a long shadow across his life. Seeing how ideas apply or fail to apply was what he spent his creative life doing. After that, as a democratic socialist, he supported the Labor Party, as he explained in an article called "Why Lucky Jim Turned Right," down to the late 1960s; and for the last quarter century of his life, which ended at seventy-three, he was a conservative and eventually a Thatcherite, resenting after 1990 the rejection of Margaret Thatcher by her own followers as prime minister and hating, as she does, British membership of the European Union.

As his article on turning right shows, however, Amis was always less interested in getting a judicious answer to a problem than in defining himself, through political debate, to himself and others. Debate was how you scored. When his son Martin Amis protested with mounting indignation against hunting whales and told how they were brutally harpooned and sliced up for cosmetics, Kingsley is said to have answered gently: "It sounds like rather a good way of using up whales." That has nothing much to do with policy, a lot to do with how one generation puts another in its place. He was against the Left, above all, less for its policies than because he did not like the sort of people who claimed to believe in it; he was against John Major, in his last years, because he did not like the sort of people who in 1990 had supported him, just as he had once been a socialist because he had hated the sort of people who voted Conservative. Politics as such hardly interested him. He was Labor when I first knew him, but could never have answered the question why nationalization would favor the poor; just as in old age, after the Conservative Party had turned suddenly enthusiastic about a competitive free market, he could never have told you what was conservative about that. But then nor could anyone else.

His mind was rapid and engagingly simple, as the minds of great satirists often are. The Left is supposed to be caring, throughout the Western industrial world, and the Right competent; when you are young you want to be thought caring, and when you are old you want to be thought competent. Among the chattering classes, at least, politics is less about policies than about how you want the world to see you and how you want to see yourself.

Amis was the king of the chatterers. He lived for talk, his books are talk recorded in print—they commonly begin, as *Lucky Jim* did, with a remark in dialogue—and he learned the craft of fiction less by reading, one might suspect, than by talking and listening. You do not have to know much to be a novelist, I remember his saying, since the reader, if you put one technical detail in, will always assume you know the rest of them. Talk had to be fast, and you were not supposed to bore or be bored. His books may look malicious, not least his memoirs. But malice is more amusing than love, which he also valued, and it is more memorably epitomized by language. “If you can’t say anything nice about anyone, sit by me” might have been his motto. No put-down was swifter than his, whether in conversation or in print, and by his last years he had won that covetable role in British society, the Licensed Curmudgeon. He was always good for a quote, and you felt privileged to be insulted by him.

Of religion he had none. To call him an atheist would be to exaggerate his interest in divine providence, since he could not really see why anyone should bother with the matter at all. I once discovered, to my surprise, that he had read the New Testament—perhaps rather recently—out of anthropological interest; but his mind remained secular to his dying day. He once wrote an essay “On Christ’s Nature” in which he casually asked why God, if he wanted human beings to have religion, “did not simply give it to them, instead of arranging the world in one way and then sending someone along to explain that really the whole set-up was quite different.” I do not know what a theologian would say to that; he might feel, in Wittgenstein’s famous phrase, that it was starting the argument too far back. But then reverence was not a sentiment to which Amis would ever admit.

Behind the confident, blimpish mask, glass in hand, lay a terror of the world, much as his friend Larkin’s brisk manner masked a

terror of death, and in conversation you sometimes sensed it as he spoke. His machismo was a front. He hated to be alone in a house or without a companion on a train, felt at ease only among cronies and always refused invitations to make speeches. I once came upon him in evening dress in Cambridge, and he explained that a student society had invited him to speak at their dinner party. He had written back "I do not speak," as he always did, and they had rather decently asked him to come anyway. The ghosts that haunted him were no doubt various, but one of them, at least, has been immortalized in one of his best novels, *The Green Man* (1969), a tightly plotted ghost story based on a real experience. But then even *Lucky Jim*, that cheerful tale, has its quantum of fear—the fear of a callow young man of the social world in which he teaches as an untenured lecturer—and the comic surface of his fiction is subject to sudden cliff-falls of fright, unease and doubt. Though he learned a lot from P. G. Wodehouse, whom he read and reread, it is no sunny world like Wodehouse's that he offers. His most abiding fear, perhaps, was of embarrassment, and his books tell of quaking voices, hesitant gestures and damp handshakes. His heroes suffer embarrassment themselves and inflict it on others in pre-emptive strikes. Fiction and poems were often a way of hitting back at a cruel world.

So were his pleasures. Drinking started soon after midday, usually in a London club, by which hour his working day was largely done, and I recall him sitting enthroned in one such place—at least the chair, which seemed to be his by traditional right, looked larger and handsomer than the rest—a succession of whiskies in his hand and a flow of anecdotes on his lips, surrounded by a semicircle of acolytes, mostly journalists and political activists. By then he was the Great Cham of the New Right, a sort of late twentieth-century Dr. Johnson, but with an admixture of abundant and faultless mimicry. Johnson, one imagines, always spoke in his own voice. Amis did all the voices. When he was knighted in 1990 I asked him if it made any difference. "Useful if anybody tries anything on me," he said, and suddenly turned into an importunate tradesman: "I have a bone to pick with you, Mr. Amis." Then back to his own voice, duly magnified. "Sir Kingsley, if you don't mind."

His talk was personal, merciless to his enemies, and he never denied that his fiction was too. "I have already written an account

of myself,” he wrote in his *Memoirs*, “in twenty or more volumes, most of them called novels.” That is not to say he was Lucky Jim. I recall his dining in college shortly after he arrived in Cambridge in 1961, when my colleagues were abashed to find not a lumpish oaf who threw things and broke things but a well-suited figure interested in vintage wines and the musical compositions of lesser members of the Bach family. Though he had a sense of fun, he was never a roughneck; some of his tastes were fastidious and many of them, especially in the weekly column on restaurants he once wrote for a London journal, downright expensive. Fiction complemented life, and you wrote a novel, in his view, or anything else, to score points. “That will make them sweat a bit,” he would say of his emotions as he wrote. Though fond of money, he was even fonder of winning an argument, and a recent biography by Eric Jacobs (1994) confirms in pitiless detail how close the novels are to life. *Take a Girl Like You* has to do with his first wife, *Jake’s Thing* with his second, the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard, whom he married in 1965; and *The Old Devils*, with which he won the Booker Prize in his sixties, in 1986, is about growing old. Experience was there to be used. What else would it be for? “My second wife has walked out on me,” he remarked in the 1980s, in the Anglo-American voice he adopted when he used an American turn of phrase, “and I am now living with my first wife and her husband as a live-in pair.” When I asked him if he would dare to make a novel out of that, I had no idea he was already at it. It is called *The Folks That Live on the Hill*. Quick-witted as he was, even he must have missed chances as he talked, and a novel is an opportunity to say the things you ought to have said at the time, to make people sweat a bit, and even to do the things you wish you had done.

When Amis died in October 1995, several of the obituaries remarked that he did not care what other people thought.

It would be truer to say he never cared about anything else. Other minds fascinated him endlessly, and how they reveal and disguise themselves in speech and gesture and action. I never told him what I thought about his fiction, even when we were colleagues, except when I once wrote to him, rather ungraciously, to say that I had found something too gloomy. (He replied that next time he would write a ribtickler). So perhaps this is the moment, Amis-like, to say what I should have said and to do what

I wish I had done. When I read his novels, as they appeared, they were the first I had ever known that were about the world I lived in. That made them a little worrying. As Brian Moore's mother is reported to have said about his fiction, I kept expecting me to come in. Reading Amis was not, and is not, an unalloyed pleasure, and he might not have minded to be told it. There was always something punitive about them.

He might have minded, however, to be told that he was a master of decorum, or rather of the shifting line between what is acceptable in social life and what is not. Good manners, in the conventional sense, interested him only as a cockshy, and when Harold Nicolson was rash enough to write a book called *Good Behaviour* (1955) Amis' review began menacingly: "I have been waiting for some time to get my hands on this one." It was the front line in the battle of the generations that called him, and it held him fast in the long fictional tradition that stretches back, as he knew, for two centuries and more to the novels of his acknowledged master, who was Henry Fielding. Experimental fiction seemed to him to dodge the issue, he would say, because it was always about experiment in style and never in substance. As a critical point that looks unanswerable. Realistic novels, by contrast, are experiments in life itself, in the style and substance of living. They are about how people behave to one another, how they divulge or conceal their greed, carnality and hatred, how they love and seek to be loved, and how they hide (or fail to hide) their terror, embarrassment and boredom.

His novels, more specifically, like Harold Pinter's plays, are about city life. Both are London authors, born there and reared there, and their satire belongs forever to its streets and bars and clubs. Taking the piss, as the Cockney phrase is, lies at the heart of what they do. Like all big-city fun, the Cockney piss-take can mask grudging acceptance and even amiability. Love is seldom spoken of, in that world, though desire is, and the awkward problem of self-revelation is solved by elaborate self-mimicry and the mimicry of others. People speak not to say what they think but to conceal it, much as chess players struggle hard not to lose a pawn and are shrewd enough to surrender before they are beaten.

But that, after all, is life as it is lived, wherever educated beings talk to conceal themselves and to probe the defenses of others. No wonder we mimic, no wonder we are mimicked. Perhaps we are all Kingsley Amis.

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

The Glories

(Antonio de Ulloa 1716–95)

You that look to nature for the truth
Consider the indigo mountain, measureless;
Consider the angel flying over the mountain
Dressed like a star, an eagle or a man.
Antonio de Ulloa at daybreak
Stood with six companions on the peak
Of Pambamarca buried in a cloud.
The rising sun dissolved this to a mist,
A scarcely visible scrim. Due West
No more than thirty yards from where he stood
Each traveller saw, as in a looking glass

The perfect image of himself, his head
At the bull's-eye of three concentric irises,
Rainbows glowing yellow, green and red,
Encompassed by an arch the hue of silver.
Antonio waved. His spectre followed suit—
Waving, leaping, bowing courteously,
Blind to the wonder of the traveller.
Each man beheld an angel of himself
Shimmering in a glory it could not see
For gazing at the mortal on the mountain,
The shadowed master, backed up by the sun.

This was remarkable to the scientist
Who wrote down the tints of the aurora,
Flesh color radiating vermilion,
Orange turning yellow fading to straw.
But what seemed more remarkable was this:
Though they stood together, brothers in Christ

Watching these glories appear and fade away,
 The sun shone with such natural discretion
 Each of the seven saw his apparition
 As if it were a private, holy vision,
 As if one stood alone on Pambamarca.

Bobolink

You rise from dry meadowgrass
 With a laborious flutter, more
 Wing-action than the shortness of your flight
 Would seem to call for

And so it seems obvious
 Flying for you is a steep effort
 Nature exacts though not without amends,
 Bobolink, reedbird;

The wiry tones of your song
 Set forth a waltz in clear whistles
 At first, so well-sustained! But then you break
 Down the bars, stampede

Your notes into a reckless
 Fantasia piped at lightning speed
 No one can follow—not the barn swallow
 Who soars with such grace,

Not the bird-watcher stalking
 The field, not Blind Tom with all his skill
 At sound-catching, his passion for filling
 Darkness with music.

Ricebird, reedbird, bobolink,
 Your song is the strained apology

For all of the weak-winged, condemned to sing
Because we cannot fly.

Collection

I rode a hundred miles in a limousine,
Gun in my belt to capture what was mine.
He knew what was coming. Held the door for me,
Poured the drink I knocked back spitefully.

I told him if he did not pay
Me what he owed, I would take away
His car, his house and furniture, his land,
The ring from his finger, finger from his hand.

I told him if he did not pay
Me X amount of cash by Saturday
There would be no Sunday. I would take
One by one the weeks of his month away,

The days of his year the years of his life;
I'd take away his children and his wife,
All he ever dreamed or had not dared
Yet dream, that too, nothing would be spared.

He nodded. When I had gone out the door,
Leaving it open for the night to enter,
I wept because I didn't know for sure
What the man owed me, what I had come for

Or how I'd lived without it for so long.
My rage was old already, the night was young.
Under the cracked laughter of the moon,
I ordered my patient driver to move on.

ALLEN HOEY

A World Remembered

Mornings when he woke inside the tent
all he knew was the small, musty space
and the sounds of birds coming from someplace
vaguely outside it; then, slowly, a creek's
harmonics and the faint shuffling and clinks
from scattered camps he'd passed further down
the logging road. From these traces he was left
to construct a world in which they made sense:
soft bodies of birds and trees in which
the birds could perch, air for their small forms
to flare through; water and banks to contain
its flow, and in which trees were rooted, and rocks
around which the water could form its song.
When he came to the rustling he took
for bodies crawling from bedrolls, the careful
clatter of pebbles, thud of log dropped
in the fire ring, splashing water and chink
as the pot scraped the grating, he remembered
a whole world beyond canvas and a sky
brightening the room where his wife
even now might be rising, and the children
rising, and cars and roads and eggs for breakfast,
men and women, faces he knew and faces
he had to create in all their sharp
particulars, rising and dressing, all of them,
even the three red lights that blinked at night
on a distant smokestack, dim in sunrise
but blinking for as long as he could hold them
clear in his mind, as long as he could remember.

SYDNEY LEA

After Valentine's

for Tink Hood, a reader

I snowshoed back by evening of Valentine's Day, or one day
past.
So call it late afternoon.
I upbraided myself, who've remained in all these 50-odd years
on earth
so damnably slow to notice things, important or otherwise.

Hiking, for instance, I'd somehow recognized the absence
from my northcountry woods of the logging ramps,
themselves constructed of logs
back in the days of timber horse and handsaw.

Decades ago, they had already started to crumble,
heartleaf popple trees grown up within their grids;
but now they've simply mouldered down to mulch and loam,
though I hadn't considered them gone till today.

Just so, in other places, the Milky Way is no more,
nor the forest edge, all quick with game,
nor the resonance of names.
Unbinding the shoes, I whispered *Union Street Bridge*,

words that once suggested trout and ephemerid,
and even before I made for it quickened my pulse and my
breathing,
as I imagined casting a line
downstream from this 90's sprawl of stores and fern-clogged
bars,

the valley now become what's called by travel agents and
 tourists
 a "destination"—as surely it was for me back then.
 But that was different, I was a child,
 I must have reckoned

that naming an object of love could hold it forever.
 That love was destiny.
 And now my mind keeps turning, turning,
 its trail as blurred as my snowshoes'.

I drive with care, for instance, because my daughter, 18,
 yesterday flipped a car on Interstate 91.
 Today she might be gone,
 I might be broken to pieces,

I might be whispering *Erika, Erika*, over and over again,
 aloud, and cursing all this waste, this ruin.
 I might be longing to bring back horses.
 Instead I'm merely wheeling my way back home.

I've bought some staples—milk and eggs—at the store.
 The time of the horses was hard, no doubt,
 I mustn't sentimentalize.
 And yet there's the sick blue glow in so many windows, from
 television,

and the church bell hasn't even chimed out six.
 The log-ramps pointed toward the Connecticut River:
 knowing this (or knowing stars), you could find your bearings
 if you were lost. I heard as much from my neighbor Tink,

whose profile I see through his living room window.
 Backlit by lampglow, he's reading, as ever, his favorite.
 Or not his favorite, really. Rather his one-and-only.
 "By God, if once you try him, you'll never read no one but
 Louis Lamour."

Or so he's told me.

Tink was a roofer. Now, at 74, he refinishes yard sale chairs
 and tables,
 and coddles the creatures of his domain:
 each fall he conspires with the chickadees that hop up on his
 palm

beside his handmade feeder,
 with squirrels that scoot through his shop all winter.
 He reads. He laughs.
 The shop is full of gimcrack junk he buys for a joke:

the moosehorn toilet paper rack, the cowflop telephone,
 the Cupid denture holder,
 and that big plaster of Paris dog, a St. Bernard,
 around whose neck he once arranged a collar,

its outsized tag reading LEA.
 Reading Lea: now that's a thing that Tink will never do.
 Don't we deserve that, we cynical poets, our hearts not in it,
 who form a guild, and nothing nobler, and vanish?

Tink, I say, as planets orbit, as brook-ice jingles, as a gravid
 deer appears.

Tink, I repeat, as if I were raising a glass.
 And why in the end not offer a toast to Louis Lamour,
 if only because his name means love at last?

ROBERT B. SHAW

A Geode

What started out a glob of molten mud
hawked up by some Brazilian volcano
back in the Pleistocene is now a rock
of unremarkable appearance, brown
as ordinary mud and baseball-size.
Picking it up produces the surprise:
besides a pleasant heftiness, a sound
of sloshing can be noticed. Vapors caught
within its cooling crust were liquified,
and linger still: a million-year-old vintage.
Although one might recall the once ubiquitous
snowstorm-in-a-glass-globe paperweights,
this offers us no view inside to gauge
the wild weather a shake or two incites.
Turbulence masked by hard opacity . . .
If we could, which would we rather see?—
age-old distillate, infant tears of the earth,
or gem-like crystal of the inner walls
harboring them like some fair reliquary?
To see the one we'd have to spill the other.
Better to keep it homely and intact,
a witness to the worth of hiddenness,
which, in regard to our own kind, we call
reticence, and in terms of higher things,
mystery. Let the elixir drench unseen
the facets that enshrine it, world without end.

JOAN MURRAY

What to Do with an Inchworm

There—on the blackness of my sock, an inchworm's come to rest, having dropped from something while I was walking in the woods. And it hasn't the slightest sense of danger, rolled in an "o" in a tuft of weave, and all the options mine. Easiest, of course, is pick it off—and step on it, a swift deliverance to the place it will come to sooner or later, even if it inches another fifty miles. —God knows there was a time I would have been relieved if something had done the same for me. But what does an inchworm think about relief? What does it think at all, being the center of so much attention? Nothing. It is asleep, missing its single intersection with a *higher consciousness*. It gives no sign of noticing. It hears no dark thrumming mantra like I heard that winter when I had no hope of wings.

I've seen a picture in a book: an inchworm painted near the thing it might become, a creature of autonomy, capable of flight. But now *its* life is *mine*—my shoe is where it dropped, not far from the trespassed sock. But I am a gentler god than the ones I know. I rouse it with a finger. It lifts its back or whatever of itself agrees to be a back. It becomes an inverted "u." *Oh—you*, it has said, and I see it is alarmed, just as Adam was when he heard the clock and knew he was not alone. I slide a piece of paper underneath it, and it flails its blind, limbless self over the edge, probing illimitable space (which begins here and everywhere) for some nest it thought it owned. And now something roused in it says, *this is it*. Something says, *this is not your place*. Something says, *there is no place else*.

And so it *allows* me. Though it can't conceive of me,
 it allows the inconceivable boundaries of my paper
 as the only way to negotiate those boundaries.
 Look how still it has become. Still and tense as we go
 through the heavy door, still and tense across the porch
 and through the lighter door that slams behind us.
 If I dropped it now, a bird might find it.
 But it has no fear of birds. No equipment for specificity,
 just the stark, original fear without its feathered gown.
 I watch how it survives the crisis of its life—with nothing
 to measure—nothing to choose. It knows only *hold on*.
 And it holds as I nudge it against a maple. It remembers
hold on as I brush it against an oak. It holds and it holds
 till I scrape it against a leaf—a bitten leaf on some kind
 of sapling I don't know. And now it goes,
 lifting itself and flattening itself, to find what it needs
 or at least be free from the duress of intentions.

Play-By-Play

Yaddo

Would it surprise the young men
 playing softball on the hill to hear the women
 on the terrace admiring their bodies:
 the slim waist of the pitcher, the strength
 of the runner's legs, the torso of the catcher
 rising off his knees to toss the ball back to the mound?
 Would it embarrass them
 to hear two women, sitting together after dinner,
 praising even their futile motions:
 the flex of a batter's hips
 before his missed swing, the wide-spread stride
 of a man picked off his base, the intensity
 on the new man's face
 as he waits on deck and fans the air?

Would it annoy them, the way some women
 take offense when men caress them with their eyes?
 And why should it surprise me that these women,
 well past sixty, haven't put aside desire
 but sit at ease and in pleasure,
 watching the young men move above the rose garden
 where the marble Naiads
 pose and yawn in their fountain?
 Who better than these women, with their sweaters
 draped across their shoulders, their perspectives
 honed from years of lovers, to recognize
 the beauty that would otherwise
 go unnoticed on this hill?
 And will it compromise their pleasure
 if I sit down at their table to listen
 to the play-by-play and see it through their eyes?

Would it distract the young men if they realized
 that three women laughing softly on the terrace
 above closed books and half-filled wineglasses
 are moving beside them on the field?
 Would they want to know how they've been
 held to the light till some motion or expression
 showed the unsuspected loveliness
 in a common shape or face?
 Wouldn't they have liked to see how they looked
 down there, as they stood for a moment at the plate,
 bathed in the light of perfect expectation,
 before their shadows lengthened, before they
 walked together up the darkened hill,
 so beautiful they would not have
 recognized themselves?

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Village Evening

This evening, fruit bats will hang once again
from the rain-wet deodars
and the wind
tug at the clothes draped
around God's little idol
at the foot of the ageing banyan.
In the dingy air of her hut,
Ahalya, the widow, caresses the rupee
her seven-year-old son
has brought home from his day-long labours,
and dreams of daybreak.
The whole village seems to crouch
in the darkness of faith.
Life hungers in this humid air,
not ashamed of Ahalya's bare voice:
"What a relief there are just
the two of us! Or else
this little money would get us nowhere."
The air flows through the paddy fields, becoming
movement, blood, breath; but stranger
than rape and murder without a scream.
And in the round, indifferent eyes of God,
another shudder passes through the thin body;
as Ahalya, moving sleepily, unrolls her mat,
her promise to feed her son milk-curd next morning
another faraway dream.

TOM WAYMAN

The Colors of the Forest

As I wandered on the bank of a stream
in the sunny afternoon
I found where someone had placed two logs
to bridge the water

and I crossed

The creek was sluggish, braided
into pools and boggy puddles
between cliffs down which aspen spilled

A hawk
rode July winds over the coulee
Squirrels rehearsed their staccato protest

And I noticed a gate or stile
of poles
blocking a small gully
that descended toward the stream
There was no fence, only the poles I climbed through
and entered under the canopy of poplars
A clearing stretched ahead
wide as a road, yet I could not see stumps
or any other indication
this space was not natural
Underfoot, when I followed the opening
were low grasses and ferns
as though the area had been mowed
Small birds darted among the branches
on either side, settling and rising in groups, like fish
if fish could pipe and whistle
Insects spoke loudly, monotonously
I heard the hawk cry overhead

Hiking that dappled road, I felt
 suffused with a joy
 tangible as a song
 that rang amid the trees, its tones and rhythm and words
 fashioning a world
 that never before existed
 And the absence in this wood
 of familiar human myths and presences
 was strong enough I sensed
 I was led along this route
 by another kind of being
 or beings
 who sang in pleasure
 Yet some dark aspect of me
 started to complain
 about the brevity of the afternoon
 how my happiness at
 the sunshine bright as clouds
 on the upper surface of the leaves
 this portion of only one day
 must soon end
 But how the light released
 all the colors of the forest
 —the way the light breathed into pulsing fire
 yellow scents and green sounds
 —argued that for these moments
 beauty
 suspended
 time

And while these voices
 of discontent and music
 raged in my head
 I thought they merged into flowing water
 until they were drowned by flowing water
 and I came upon a brook
 that scurried between stones and roots
 —a tributary, I guessed, of the languid stream
 I had left behind

Where the busy water crossed the road
that was not a road
a pool had been formed or dug
in the shaded earth
When I stepped closer
I saw a wooden ladle, roughly carved
hung by its handle above the basin

I knelt by the pool's edge
—on one knee only, as the Bible cautions
—and reached for the dipper
and brought the icy fluid to my lips
So intensely cold, this nectar
seemed sweet to my tongue and throat
I drank and felt this water
flow through my limbs like cooled blood
I knew I was not the first to drink here
nor the last
I rehung the ladle on its branch
I understood this was an honor given me
greater than the day
—to have been been brought to this fountain
to have drunk
It could not matter whether I was the best or worst person
to be shown this spring
I drank, and the water filled me
and the sun and moon shone down through the trees

TOM SEXTON

At Feng-hsiang

Tu Fu thought of that cold night
at the beginning of his long absence

when he watched the white bird's flight
over moonless snow.

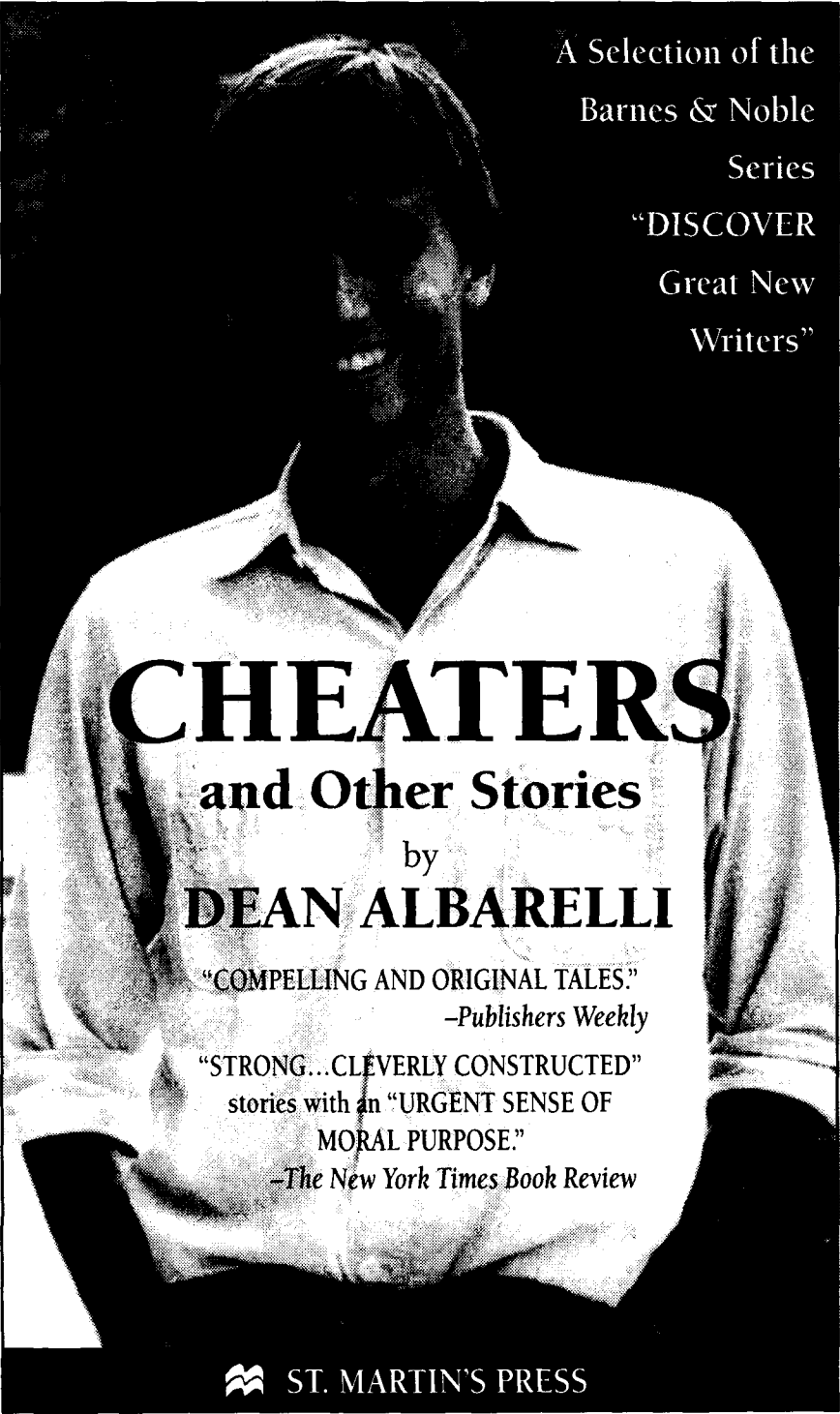
Watching the bird disappear, he knew
his bones were hollow with desire.

Later, when he went outside for snow
to melt for tea,

he was certain that he could smell
pine needles in the mist.

Perhaps he would leave at daybreak
or word would arrive from his wife saying:

the plum has blossomed,
there is wine to fill your cup.



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BERT CARDULLO

Lands of the Free

THE THEMES OF COMMUNISM, NEOREALISM, AND ILLUSION CONJOIN in two recent films from Western Europe, each of which also sends its protagonist on a literal as well as spiritual journey. The first is called *Lamerica*, directed and co-written by the Italian Gianni Amelio, the style and subject of whose previous picture, *Stolen Children* (1993), likewise revealed the influence of neorealism. The difference here is that neorealism not only has influenced *Lamerica*'s cinematic style and thematic substance, it is also something of a subject or proposition itself. In this Amelio's film resembles *Il Bidone* (1955), the stark and bitter social drama that was Fellini's answer to criticism from the Left that he had betrayed neorealist principles in *La Strada* (1954). Like *Il Bidone*, *Lamerica* is about an attempted swindle; unlike Fellini's movie, however, it focuses not on the relationship between the crooks (nor, as does the typical American picture, on the story of the scam itself) but on the connection between a con man and those he would con.

Lamerica opens with newsreel footage of Italian armed forces invading Albania in 1939. Then we cut to Albania in 1991, after nearly fifty years of isolation under the Communist dictatorship headed by Enver Hoxha and his successor, Ramiz Alia. Post-Communist Albania, Europe's poorest country, is in turmoil, led by a Socialist regime that will hold power for only one year; the landscape is alternately barren and strewn with rubble, the populace devastated and anarchic. Moreover, no amount of bunkers—built along the coast by the Communists to guard against another military invasion—will protect the Albanians from economic invasion by Italian carpetbaggers. *Lamerica* thus makes an implicit connection between Albania in the early 1990s and postwar Italy: both nations were physically, spiritually, and financially in ruin as well as reeling from the deleterious sociopolitical effects of dictatorship; and even as many Italians (Amelio's grandfather among them) left their country after World War II, when it needed—or perhaps did not need—they most, one out of eight Albanians emigrated from his homeland during the period the film describes. Out of such conditions Italian neorealism emerged—and has reemerged in the capable hands of Gianni Amelio—to investigate the conflict between ordinary (as opposed to exceptional or exalted) human beings and the immense societal forces that are completely external to them yet completely determine their existences.

One such ordinary human being is Gino, the young business associate

of Fiore, a middle-aged entrepreneur. These two Italians have arrived in Durazzo with the aim of turning Albania's misery into their private gain: they intend to set up a shoe factory that will pour government subsidies into their pockets without producing the requisite shoes for the Albanian people. The prosperous Fiore has pulled this sort of scam before—in Nigeria, for one place, by making bogus television sets; the slick Gino, for his part, dreams of getting rich quickly and easily through this latest hustle. In order to do so, he and his boss must not only bribe a corrupt official, they must also find an Albanian to be the figurehead of their dummy corporation, preferably someone who suffered under Hoxha's regime. From a ghastly-ghostly looking labor camp that once housed political prisoners, the two partners commandeer eighty-year-old Spiro Tozai, a withdrawn, confused, and sometimes tearful illiterate who can write his name, which is all that the Italians require of him. Fiore returns to Italy at this point, leaving Gino to escort Spiro from Durazzo to the capital of Tirana, where the helpless old man has to sign the papers that will enable the Italians to do business in Albania. And it is here that *Lamerica* takes the same turn as Amelio's *Stolen Children*, where a carabinieri was left by his fellow officer to escort two children on a journey from Milan to an orphanage in Sicily.

Gino's journey with Spiro immediately stalls, however, when the old man runs away from the orphanage in Durazzo where he has been stowed overnight and boards a train that he thinks will take him back to Sicily. For Spiro Tozai, his guardian learns, is not Albanian but Italian: a Sicilian (like Gino himself) named Michele Talarico. He was one of the Italian soldiers in the opening newsreel, many of whom defected and assumed Albanian identities. Imprisoned for half a century, apparently on suspicion of anti-Communist activity, Spiro-Michele kept his real nationality a secret out of fear of reprisal. Now he wants to return to the wife and young son he left behind for service in Mussolini's army, in the muzzy belief that only a few years have passed since his jailing and that they still await him. Traveling by jeep, Gino catches up with him in Baqel, where Michele has wandered from the train at its station stop and been stripped of his jacket and shoes by a horde of assaultive, ravenous children (only one of a number of such systematically deprived, and therefore determinedly malevolent, hordes we see scurrying throughout the film). In one of those silent moments that eloquently speak—moments with which both *Lamerica* and *Stolen Children* are filled—Gino gets another pair of shoes for Michele from a corpse at what passes for the local hospital, where the younger man has gone to retrieve his octogenarian charge from treatment for shock.

They continue by jeep on the road to Tirana but its wheels are stolen when the two men stop to rest at a café. Not only are there no toilet and no refreshments—much to Gino's surprise—there is also no telephone in this place, so he can't call for help. Just as the vulnerable Michele had been stripped of his clothing in Baqel, the careless Gino has now been stripped of his vehicle, with all the freedom and "direction" that it

represents; furthermore, what money he has is useless here, since there's almost nothing to buy. He is forced to experience Albania's upheaval from the ground up, so to speak, which means from the same vantage point or eye-view as everyone else—a perspective whose uncertainty or instability is occasionally accentuated by a handheld camera.

Gino and Michele resume their trip, but this time by mass transportation: first on a crowded bus and next, when the bus is detained by brutal police in search of deserting Albanians, on a mobbed truck for which they've had to wait for hours. The old man is still lost in the reverie that he's on his way back to his family in Sicily, to which the young one can only respond in anger, "The war ended fifty years ago! Your wife's probably dead." Michele's wife may be dead, but for him together with the Albanians, the "war"—Communism's war against humanity—has just ended and they are struggling to make their way in a strange and harsh new world. Gino's own reverie, as previously noted, is that he will exploit the economic possibilities of that world, just as the dream of most Albanians he meets—a dream fueled by the opulent idiocy of the Italian television they watch in bars and shelters—is to achieve wealth by moving to the paradise of Italy.

The Albanians, of course, will be disabused of their illusion if they ever cross the Adriatic Sea, where, Gino tells those who will listen, they can look forward to lowly lives as car- or dishwashers. The Italian is disabused of his illusion, too, however, when he is fired by Fiore over the telephone at a barracks-like hotel near Tirana, then arrested by Albanian officials for his part in the shoe-factory scam. Released from jail on the condition that he leave the country at once, a ragged Gino boards a ship for home that is packed with Albanian refugees. He had paid the owner of the flophouse near Tirana to lodge and feed Michele for the rest of his days, but now he finds his fellow Sicilian among the boat's throng of hopeful passengers. The two men had grown close through their shared travails (hunger and fatigue chief among them), and for this reason the smiling Michele's first words to his dejected friend are, "We can travel together." They have experienced a role-reversal of sorts since Gino's dismissal and arrest, with the old man taking charge and offering solace, even bread. Except that now Michele is possessed of a new fantasy: that this ship, named *Partisans*, is taking him to America (the film's title is meant to be an illiterate Italian's spelling of L'America), to which he says his parents had immigrated before World War II.

"Partisans" naturally refers to the Italian Resistance during the war. This is not so ironic a reference where Michele and the Albanians are concerned, since he could be said to have resisted Mussolini by deserting the Fascist army, while they are partisan-like in their blind adulation of the new if noxious Italy. The reference is highly ironic when applied to Gino, however. For him, "the war ended fifty years ago," which is one way of saying that, interested only in his own prosperity, he is oblivious to the lessons of that war and its aftermath for humanity. He has learned them the hard way, nonetheless, by experiencing firsthand

the helplessness, despair, and poverty of the Albanians in the wake of the dissolution of yet another empire: not the Holy Roman and not the Third Reich, but rather the Soviet Union. Undeceived yet disconsolate, Gino sits speechless and shivering at the end amidst the stinking reality of a ship full of dreamers—headed, thinks Michele, for the ultimate dream state of America, especially as it has been represented in Hollywood movies. The last images we see in the film, after a two-shot of Michele asleep on Gino's bowed shoulder ("keep heart" were among the elderly man's final words to his silent, staring companion), are numerous close-ups of the weathered but determined faces of young as well as old passengers aboard this ship of fools. These shots lend the Albanians dignity, even beauty, at the same time that they poignantly, if not bitterly, suggest—together with a bird's-eye view of the ship's teeming deck and a closing dissolve to blinding white—the sudden, suffocating fate that awaits them in Italy.

Giuseppe M. Gaudino and Luca Bigazzi have photographed the Albanian faces, here and elsewhere in what could be called this "fugue of faces" (paradoxically, Vernon Young's description of Dovzhenko's pro-Communist ode to collective farming, *Earth* [1930]), in desaturated color, the type that Amelio also used in *Stolen Children*. This process appropriately drains the life from the images at the same time that—at least in the cases of these two Italian films—it casts a cryptically beautiful blue-green pall over what little color they have. Such cinematography is especially effective at quiet or dialogue-free moments such as those at the end of *Lamerica*, where the life force and the death mask seem commingled. Two other such moments stand out in my memory: as the truck jammed with would-be immigrants crosses rugged terrain at twilight on the way to Tirana, a young Albanian man sits dying next to Michele yet doesn't once ask for help; and in the hotel-barracks close to the Albanian capital, a feverish, famished Gino awakens to find a hip-hopping wisp of a girl in the hall, wildly energized by the onslaught of popular music-and-dance via Italian television.

This waif is played by a nonprofessional actor, as are most of the roles in *Lamerica*, including that of Spiro-Michele. Neorealist directors frequently used nonprofessionals—children prominent among them—in order to give their films an authenticity-cum-spontaneity not associated with the performances of stars or veteran character actors, and Amelio follows their example here just as he did in *Stolen Children*. The piecemeal procedures of film, combined with the fact that many roles can be nonspeaking, make such casting of complete amateurs possible; nevertheless, these procedures and circumstances do not explain the miracle of such a performance as Carmelo di Mazzarelli's in the part of Spiro-Michele. True, this character doesn't say much, but he is on screen much of the time, and he *does* do things—he does exhibit behavior or perform actions. Mazzarelli's own experience surely helped him: a retired fisherman whom Amelio found in a Sicilian harbor, he had in fact been a member of the Italian army in Albania. Amelio the

director, himself a Southern Italian who has worked in Sicily, must be given some credit, however, both as empathetic acting coach and as shrewd editor (in concert with Simona Paggi).

Complementing Mazzarelli's guarded impassivity is Enrico Lo Verso's supple acuteness in the role of Gino. Lo Verso is a professional, and he shows that the right pro need not interfere with a director's search for the truth in ordinary people—indeed, he can illuminate it. This actor played the policeman in charge of the neglected brother and sister in *Stolen Children*, and in *Lamerica* Lo Verso establishes the same prickly intimacy with Spiro-Michele as he did with Luciano and Rosetta in the earlier film. The result is not a sentimental tale of bonding between a father and the substitute for his long-lost son, but a subtle fiction that reveals the touched and touching child in the wizened man, as well as the wise man in the touchy and tactless child. Left out of this equation, of course, is the powerful Michele Placido in the role of Fiore, whose early and at first unexpected exit from *Lamerica* may become as famous as Lea Massari's sudden departure from another Italian film about actual as well as inner journey: Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960).

The latest film by the prolific Ken Loach, *Land and Freedom*, features a professional actor in the leading role, but as usual in this British director's work, nonprofessionals are scattered throughout the cast. As usual, too, Loach's style and subject recall the cinema of neorealism. In fact, he and his screenwriter, Jim Allen, set their picture during the Spanish Civil War, in which Italy (together with Germany) supported Franco and which was, of course, the prelude to World War II—the experience and aftermath of which provided Italian neorealists like Rossellini and De Sica with so much of their material. *Land and Freedom* has been called Loach's first “epic,” and as such a departure from the working-class, English milieu of films like *Riff-Raff* (1993), *Raining Stones* (1994), and *Ladybird, Ladybird* (1995), to name only his most recent ones. But *Land and Freedom* is epic more in the Brechtian than the Homeric, in the neorealistic rather than the paleomythic sense, in that it is concerned with the little man's experience of war rather than the majestic hero's, and in that it regards war not as the means to the end of national or ethnic advancement, but instead as the means to the ending of such tribalism altogether in favor of the eventual establishment of a worldwide communist utopia. As such, Loach's new offering is no different in spirit from all the other socially conscious, if sometimes politically tendentious, films he has been making since 1964.

Land and Freedom begins in the present, with the death in Liverpool of the aged David, an English working man and communist. Then, as his granddaughter goes through a cache of his letters, clippings (from *The Daily Worker*, among other newspapers), and photographs, the film flashes back to their subject: the Spanish Civil War, in which Dave volunteered to fight in 1936 after seeing a newsreel (which we see, too, just as we saw one at the start of *Lamerica*) of Franco's brutal insurrection against Spain's democratically-elected Republican government. The

granddaughter knows nothing of this war, hence one aspect of the film concerns her political education, even radicalization, and the relevance of what she learns to present-day England, if not the Western world in general. Since we never get to know her as a character, yet come back to her in the present a number of times as she looks and reads—with Dave speaking in voice-over—this young woman is clearly meant to be a stand-in for everyone watching *Land and Freedom*. Otherwise Loach would simply have begun the film at the time of the Spanish Civil War and kept it in that period. I bring this matter up because several critics have attacked what they regard as the superfluousness, indeed crudity, of the flashback device. It certainly is not superfluous, and, given its organic relation to the story, the device seems fairly subtle to me. What may be crude or bald is the *lesson* derived by the granddaughter—and by extension transmitted to us—from her foray into the past. But more on that subject later. For now, I'd like to concentrate on the moral journey Dave makes after he takes leave of his wife with the words, "I haven't any future in England," and travels first by ship, then by train, to Barcelona.

Ostensibly, Dave goes to Spain to fight on the side of communism. (He is a card-carrying member of the international Communist Party.) What he discovers, however, is that the Republican Loyalist opposition to the Nationalist Falangists, or Spanish fascists, consists of anti-fascist leftists of all kinds: democrats, socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, and communists of various stripes—Stalinists prominent among them. These people hail from almost everywhere in Europe as well as America, and they are united in the struggle against totalitarianism if by little else. We do get to experience Dave's vivid combat life as a member of a people's militia; to share in his doomed love affair with the loyalest of Loyalists, the beautiful Blanca, who fights in the ranks alongside him; and to contemplate his involvement in (ponderous) discussion groups over issues of communist policy such as collectivization. But most of all, and most important, we get to witness Dave's encounters with Leftist factionalism, for *Land and Freedom* is less about the war between Loyalists and Falangists than the ceaseless fighting among the anti-Franco forces themselves—in the film, largely over the issue of disbanding the various revolutionary militias in favor of a centralized, professionalized Popular Army supplied and supported by the Soviet Union. The strife among the "forces of freedom" did as much to defeat them in three years of war as did Franco's German-armed and Italian-reinforced troops, together with the reluctance of Western democracies such as the United States, France, and Great Britain (as opposed to individual volunteers from those countries) to intervene on the side of the communists.

Dave, for his part, is torn between remaining with his militia unit (and Blanca) and joining the International Brigade (a.k.a. the Spanish Popular Army), ultimately returning to the former in disgust at the subversions by Stalin of communist ideals, and in disillusionment at the temporizing or compromising by bureaucrats of communist principles. In fact, so bitter and deep is Dave's epiphany that he rips up his

membership card, calling the Party evil and corrupt. He is a communist in the idealistic or ideational, humanistic sense, you see, not in the practical, political one. This is the film's conceit, as it were, which one can accept despite how one may feel about the history of communism subsequent to the Spanish Civil War, and especially since the fall of Communist autocracy in the Soviet Union.

At Dave's funeral in the present of the 1990s, it's clear that his friends and relatives, young and old, who raise their fists in the communist salute, still strongly believe in the *idea* of communism. So do I, except that, in the light of history, I'd change the word from communism to communalism, which puts the emphasis on human communion and cooperation rather than governmental communiqué and control. Except also that I don't believe this idea could ever be put into practice on a wide scale, given what we know about the divisiveness of human nature. If Loach and his characters still think that communism can, and should, be put into practice throughout the world, shame on them for their naïveté or their obtuseness. *Land and Freedom* is inconclusive on this point—though its director's political tendentiousness is otherwise apparent in his casting of an American (the boring and babbling Tom Gilroy) in the role of chief apologist for Joseph Stalin—and that is its flaw. I'd like to believe, however, that the ultimate meaning of Loach's film is contained in the humane gesture of Dave's granddaughter as his body is lowered into its Liverpool grave. She pours earth from the grave of Blanca (which Dave had saved after her murder by Stalinist Loyalists) onto her grandfather's coffin, as she quotes the following lines from William Morris' wishful poem "The Day Is Coming" (1884):

Come, join in the only battle wherein no man can fail,
Where whoso fadeth and dieth, yet his deed shall still prevail.

Ah! come, cast off all fooling, for this, at least, we know:
That the Dawn and the Day is coming, and forth the Banners go.

Blanca's and Dave's spirits thus commune if their bodies cannot, especially when one considers that the scene of her burial in the past is placed immediately before his interment in the present, and that therefore in a sense he died when she did. They are now one with the salt of the earth, and they both are free. The immortality of divine love has prevailed over the ephemerality of base politics—a victory that the socialist Morris' own poem seems to imply or predict with its Christian overtones, as do other poems of his such as "The God of the Poor" (1868), "Love Fulfilled" (1870), "Love's Reward" (1872), and "Echoes of Love's House" (1873).

My interpretation of *Land and Freedom* is supported, in any event, by the way it looks. Barry Ackroyd's color cinematography does for the film's subject what good black-and-white documentary photography would do (and does in the opening newsreel from the Spanish Civil

War): where the documentarian would use various shades of gray to complicate his subject matter instead of simplifying it through bold blacks and whites, Ackroyd (Loach's regular cinematographer) subdues the lushness of his colors with an overlay that alternates between blue-gray and blue-green. The effect is similar to the one achieved by the cinematographers of *Lamerica*, which is to communicate simultaneously the ideas of death-in-life and life-in-death. As David, Ian Hart (last seen here as John Lennon in *Backbeat* [1994]) unfortunately appears to take the death-motif a bit too literally and consequently gives a pallid performance—certainly one that pales by comparison with Rosana Pastor's piquant Blanca. What both these performers as well as the rest of the cast could have used is something almost entirely absent from *Land and Freedom*'s script but abundantly present in another, relatively recent movie about the Spanish Civil War, Carlos Saura's *Ay, Carmela!* (1991): a sense of humor, specifically, a tragicomic or even grotesque perspective on people and events that would enlarge the film's vision of history and thus remove from it any hint of propaganda. True, *Lamerica* has no such sense of humor, but then again its view of the world and history is complex enough not to require one. The Leftist Loach is not averse to laughter—witness the comedy in his *Riff-Raff* and *Raining Stones*—so I am particularly disappointed that he has not used it to leaven the daily bread, or relieve the daily workers, of *Land and Freedom*.

RICHARD HORNBY

Historic Theatres

ONE BRIGHT MORNING LAST SPRING, an E-Mail appeared in my In-Box from my pal Tom Markus, a stage director who lives and teaches in Salt Lake City, but who, like me, roams the world on theatrical adventures. "Peter Hall will direct Alan Howard in Ranjit Bolt's new translations of *Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* on August 30–31 at Epidaurus. We plan to be there!" A few phone calls, a flurry of faxes, and I was all set to join the pilgrimage.

The Hellenistic theatre at Epidaurus in Greece is the most beautiful, and best preserved, theatre of the ancient world. On a Peloponnesian hillside a few hours south of Athens, its 55 semicircular rows of stone seats rise gracefully high above the remains of its stage, and around the well-preserved choral dancing circle in front of it. Located near a spring believed in ancient times to hold wondrous healing powers, surrounded by olive and pine trees and cooled by breezes from the Mediterranean a few miles away, the theatre casts its magic spell over you even when there is no play going on. It holds about 15,000 (though an elderly actor from the Greek National Theatre told me that on occasion they have been able to cram over 20,000 into it), but with its perfect sightlines and famous acoustics, every seat is a good one. The amphitheatre is in fact a model for any number of modern theatres, from the Festival Theatre at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Canada to the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles.

Alas, the magic of Epidaurus did not seem to be working for this version of Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays, which turned out to be well-spoken, but static and drab. I have long held mixed feelings about Peter Hall's directing; like many other contemporary stage directors, he tends to work from a "concept" of the play, which is based more on gut feeling than close analysis of the text. His concepts are not as outlandish as those of avant-garde directors like Peter Sellars or Robert Lepage, who like to force a contemporary meaning out of a classical play, but they nonetheless often miss their mark. Hall seemed to view *Oedipus the King* as a cultural icon, all about doom and gloom and fate, very atmospheric but totally undramatic. Bolt's ponderous translation, in rhymed couplets, added to the feeling of elevated emptiness.

In 1981, Peter Hall directed Aeschylus' *Oresteia* at Epidaurus, the first English-language production to be performed there. It was hardly a landmark in any other way, however; theatre companies from all over the world have performed at Epidaurus since World War II, while Greek

companies produce ancient plays there regularly. Hall's *Oresteia* apparently did not impress Greek theatre people, while his imperious style did little to endear him to the Greeks this time around. The Oedipus plays were nearly canceled because of Hall's decision to surround the playing area with a ring of steel drums full of burning oil, which the archaeologists in charge of the site naturally viewed with horror. (The contract with Hall's company had called for "theatrical fire," which the archaeologists naively believed to imply some kind of electrical gadgetry.) Hall's political clout enabled him to overrule the archaeologists, but at the cost of considerable ill will. Obviously, ancient productions, performed in the daytime, would have used no such effects, while the Oedipus plays themselves certainly do not mention fire per se, although there is some poetic fire imagery at the beginning of *Oedipus the King*. Hall was not attempting historically authentic staging, of course, but rather staging that would be theatrically powerful for a modern audience; but on the other hand, no effective production of an ancient play in an ancient theatre can ignore theatre history entirely, nor the details of the chosen text. Perhaps the plague at the beginning of *Oedipus the King* might justify a fire effect as some kind of purification ritual, but the true source of Hall's inspiration seemed to be a desire for an ostentatious display that would impress the international critics.

In the event, the circle of fire, appropriate or not, turned out to be the only significant visual element in an otherwise banal decor. The setting for both plays, created by veteran Greek designer Dionysis Fotopoulos (who also did the masks and costumes), consisted of a large, narrow ramp aimed straight down at the audience. While this created dramatic entrances and exits, an actor once on it could do little but perch at the end like a diver afraid to take the plunge. Ancient Greek and Roman theatres all used a wide platform with three entrances behind it; two or three characters could thus easily interact with one another on the stage, or with the chorus below and in front. Two actors on Hall's diving board already looked cramped, while three were an unstable huddle, so that Hall usually put at least one principal actor down among the chorus.

The ramp had one additional unfortunate effect: Alan Howard, exhausted at a late rehearsal, fell off and broke his right arm! Performing with a cast on it did not hinder him in *Oedipus the King*, while Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* is supposed to be a physical wreck anyway. But the fact that Howard did not really need a functioning right arm shows how essentially static these productions were. Actors would enter, stand rigidly, and speak, playing every line dead front. All the principals were masked, but with the kind of blank, neutral masks that have become popular in recent years in acting classes, and in certain avant-garde productions. A neutral mask can have a strange potency, when seen *up close* (as in classes, or in most avant-garde theatres), and when the actor animates the mask with dynamic poses, along with meaningful gestures of both head and body. But when the theatre is huge and the actors are stiff as sticks, the masks just look like pallid blobs. Ancient Greek and Roman theatrical masks, as depicted in

mosaics and vase paintings, had nothing to do with the simplistic smiling and frowning masks that one sees today as theatrical emblems; instead, they were brightly colored and highly varied, with lively, excited expressions.

In *Oedipus the King*, the exception to the rigid acting was Greg Hicks's Tiresias; nearly nude, costumed in scraps of brown material and caked with dirt, he resembled a cross between a Japanese *butoh* dancer and an aboriginal mud man. He too wore a neutral mask, which he kept dead front, but he punctuated his speech with continuous bumps and grinds that sometimes looked like writhing in pain, and sometimes recalled my trips as a teenager to Minsky's old burlesque house. The other principal actors wore loose tunics of red and black, while the chorus were all in colorless, ragged costumes.

Choral work is the acid test of any modern production of Greek tragedy. In our theatre, we have no real equivalent of the Greek chorus, which sang, danced, and engaged in dialog with the principals, sometimes as active participants in the action, and sometimes as commentators on it. Hall's chorus did not sing (except for a bit of background harmonizing in *Oedipus at Colonus*), nor even speak in unison; he merely divided up the odes among the chorus members, who spoke individually. Nor did they dance, unless wandering about all bunched up, dipping and swaying between anxious poses, counts as dancing. The chorus was, in short, all too reminiscent of every undergraduate production of Greek tragedy that I have ever seen, with a lot of creaky-Greeky generalized emotion. All the directorial choices were safe and easy, as if Hall had staged the choral scenes with the least effort possible.

But the real disappointment of the *Oedipus the King* production was in Alan Howard's Oedipus. Like all great English stage actors, Howard is a beautiful speaker, who filled the Epidauros amphitheatre easily with his resonant, melodious voice, but much of his speaking seemed mere intoning. Hicks, another fine speaker, intoned his speeches as Tiresias in a similar manner, which I could accept because of the character's mystical role as a blind old priest, possessed by the gods. Oedipus, however, is no static crooner, but a dynamic character on a quest, first to find the killer of Laius, and then to find himself. Because the play is taught in universities as an expression of the ancient Greeks' obsession with fate, modern directors and actors start with the assumption that Oedipus is guilty without question, which removes much of the drama and all of the suspense from the play. In fact, all the fated events in *Oedipus the King* happened long before the play began, while Oedipus' guilt, which is touch and go through most of the play, is never proven beyond a reasonable doubt. (The discrepancy between Oedipus' version of the killing, that acting alone he killed the king and his entire entourage, and the version prevalent in Thebes, that a *band* of men killed all but one, is never cleared up.) Alan Howard used to be one of the most exuberant, charming actors I have ever seen on any stage, but

here he just droned through the role, as if out to prove the old canard about British acting being all vocal technique and no feeling.

Oedipus at Colonus worked better in production than *Oedipus the King*, because the play itself is less dramatic, and more lyrical. There is actually a plot swirling around blind old Oedipus, who, guided by his daughter Antigone, has come to the outskirts of Athens; since Apollo has promised to defeat the enemies of anyone who will take the old man in, both Theseus, King of Athens, and Creon, King of Thebes since Oedipus' exile, have an interest in him. But the political plot is of less importance than the meditations of Oedipus, who ponders all the questions that were unasked in the earlier play: Why did his kinsmen and townspeople turn him out of Thebes, why is he considered foul and sinful when he did everything a man could to avoid fulfilling his curse, and above all, why did the gods curse him in the first place for sins committed by his ancestors, long before he was even conceived? Written when Sophocles was 92, *Oedipus at Colonus*, his last play, shows a surprisingly modern view of ethics. In *Oedipus the King*, sin is sin and pollution is pollution, regardless of the events surrounding the actions; in *Oedipus at Colonus*, circumstance and motive are foregrounded. As with us, morality is in the *intent* rather than in the mere action, so that Oedipus is not only exonerated, but undergoes some kind of apotheosis at the end of the play. Howard played Oedipus here with spiteful energy; his old man mask, complete with five o'clock shadow, was not only more interesting than the one he had in the first play, it also seemed to bring the character to life within him. Hall now placed Howard off the ramp, down in the chorus's circle, until his final exit, so that ironically, he had more mobility when shown old, blind, and lame than when he had been young and healthy.

The Oedipus plays were jointly sponsored by the Greek National Tourist Organization and the Royal National Theatre of Britain. I saw the plays again when they were redone in London in September, at the Olivier Theatre at the National. The Olivier, seating 1200, is large for a modern, indoor theatre, but still less than ten percent the size of the theatre at Epidauros. The neutral masks worked better in the smaller space, and I became aware of nuances in the performances that had either been imperceptible or nonexistent in Greece. The drums of fire were now lit by gas, which made them less spectacular but also less intrusive, while the choral movements seemed less meager on the much smaller stage. I also came to appreciate Mark Henderson's lovely incidental music; Hall had placed the musicians way behind the stage at Epidauros, so that they had been barely audible, but in London they sounded perfect. Nonetheless, the productions still paled in contrast with those directed in 1992 by Adrian Noble for the Royal Shakespeare Company,¹ which had vigorous choral work, and muscular performances by the principal actors, including Gerard Murphy as Oedipus.

¹ Reviewed here in Volume XLV, Number 4 (Winter 1993).

The English are capable of doing Greek tragedy superbly, when not crippled by hackneyed, static concepts.

Where the Oedipus plays were a continuous disappointment, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, newly reconstructed in London, turned out to be vastly better than I had expected. I had seen some cursory "platform performances" there in the fall of 1995, which led me to fear that the reconstruction project was a fiasco. At that time, the auditorium was not yet fully enclosed (and, in keeping with the original, would always be open to the skies), so that there was ambient noise from land, water, and air. Shakespeare's actors never had to compete with roaring motorcycles on the streets, tugboats on the nearby Thames, or jet planes descending toward Heathrow Airport. The stage was only a plywood mockup, which, in addition to being exceedingly ugly, absorbed rather than resonated sound. British actors are famous for their voices, but the deadly acoustics were defeating some of the lustiest lungs and most vibrant vocal cords in the land. Finally, both the stage and the auditorium seemed enormous; for years, I had been teaching about the "intimacy" of Shakespeare's theatre, but the reconstructed Globe seemed about as intimate as Piccadilly Circus.

The problem with reconstructing the Globe is that we know less about it than about any other major theatre in history. The stones of Epidaurus provide evidence of its dimensions and layout, but the Globe, demolished in 1644 by the anti-theatrical Puritan government, has left us only meager, contradictory documentation. The foundations of the building, on the south bank of the Thames near the current reconstruction, have actually been found, but unfortunately they lie underneath a land-marked eighteenth-century building. (Unoccupied and undistinguished, similar to hundreds of other eighteenth-century buildings in Britain, it could be demolished with no great loss, but you do not get very far with that kind of argument in Merrie Olde England.) Radar scans and "keyhole archaeology" (digging narrow pits that avoid damage to the building above) have failed to tell us something as basic as just how big the theatre was.

The scholar John Orrell, using a drawing of the Globe dating from 1644 by Wenceslas Hollar, who did a series of quite accurate engravings of London, has decided that the theatre was a multi-sided polygon with a diameter of a hundred feet. On the other hand, near the Globe site, the foundations of another Elizabethan theatre, the Rose, completely uncovered in 1989, are only seventy feet across. Many scholars, including Frank Hildy of the University of Georgia, argued for a Globe only eighty feet in diameter, but the late Sam Wanamaker, the Anglophile American actor who was the guiding genius behind the reconstruction project, and his chief architect Theo Crosby, decided to go with the larger dimension. The difference is greater than might at first appear. Since the audience capacity is proportional to the area of the building, which varies as the square of any linear dimension, a hundred-foot theatre would hold over fifty percent more than one of only eighty feet.

Furthermore, since the galleries surrounding the stage cannot have

been much more than fifteen feet deep, the larger building turns out to have a relatively much bigger pit or “yard,” where the “groundlings” stood uncovered, for the cheapest admission price. A big yard tends to support those who argue for a “democratic” Elizabethan theatre, appealing to all sections of society, while a small yard tends to support those who see it as having played to an elite. Was Shakespeare’s theatre a place where audiences usually stood, except for a few wealthy patrons who paid extra to sit in the roofed galleries? Or was it a place where audiences usually sat, except for a few riffraff who were allowed to stand in the open yard for a low price? The difference even has significance for staging Shakespeare’s plays today, since directors who take wild liberties with the texts often justify their approach by conjecturing a Shakespeare whose approach to playwriting was practical and popular rather than intellectual, churning out the Elizabethan equivalent of Hollywood action movies and television sitcoms. As a practical man of the theatre, Shakespeare surely would have approved anything that would dazzle a modern audience, etc., etc., etc.

Then, there is the problem of the dimensions of the stage. Inferences drawn from the 1600 building contract for the Fortune Theatre, whose stage was to replicate the one at the Globe, have led some scholars to infer that the stage at the Globe was 43 feet wide and 27.5 feet deep. This is an enormous playing area, bigger than that of any theatre in London today (whose total stage area may be bigger, but not the playing space), and, as Frank Hildy has pointed out, much deeper than that of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, Italy, built around the same time (1580) as the original Globe.² Modeled on ancient Greek and Roman theatres, the Teatro Olimpico uses the typically wide, shallow stage with three entrances at the back found in all extant classical theatres. The Rose Theatre also had a shallow stage. As a result, the Globe stage has been cut back in depth, but not in width, creating a playing area that is still big, but not to the extent that the action gets lost on it. The cutback had the additional effect, however, of enlarging the yard still further.

I thus attended the Globe this year with trepidation. So much was conjectural, and there were so many compromises; could it, or any other version, be truly said to be a reconstruction of Shakespeare’s Globe? Furthermore, few of the choices that were made seemed to be based on practical theatricality. On the other hand, many modern “practical” approaches to Shakespearean production are often disastrous. Perhaps designing a theater in the Elizabethan way, according to the best evidence, would yield serendipitous results. As the theatre historian C. Walter Hodges has noted, everybody used to think that harpsichords were merely primitive pianos, historical curiosities that no modern

² What we refer to casually as “The Globe” actually amounted to *three* theatres: The Theatre, constructed in Shoreditch by James Burbage in 1576; the Globe, built in 1598 on the south bank of the Thames, using timbers from The Theatre; and the Second Globe, built after the first Globe burned down in 1613. The current reconstruction is modeled on the first Globe, or second of the theatres.

audience would ever want to listen to, until people actually began making them again and playing them.

I am happy to report that, if the reconstructed Globe is not exactly a finely-tuned instrument, it is an intriguing performance space that functions effectively. Acoustics have greatly improved. Even though much of the theatre remains open to the sky, fully enclosing the sides has cut out much of the outside noise; even the jet planes did not seem too intrusive. The nearly-completed stage, with columns and balustrades and an overhanging roof or "heavens," resonates and reflects sound effectively. Finally, as in any theatre, having a full audience enhances acoustics. The Globe was full on the afternoon I saw *Two Gentlemen*, with a capacity of around 1500 people—which is probably only half what the Elizabethans, having no fire regulations, could cram in.

Now that it was full, the theatre no longer seemed too big. Being able to hear the actors made them seem closer; the theatre actually did become intimate. By-play between actors and audience, so important in Shakespearean comedy, was easy and unforced. Much of the interaction was with the groundlings, but those of us in the galleries, fully illuminated along with everyone else, were not left out. The actors actively had to project their voices, but not screech at the top of their lungs to be heard. It was interesting that, even without any stage lighting (this was daytime, but unlike the shows at Epidaurus, even night performances at the Globe are done under general auditorium lighting only), the stage seemed to focus the action, drawing attention to the right places at the right time. Some of the groundlings in the yard seemed surprised at first at having to stand, Elizabethan fashion, but soon entered into the spirit of the adventure, though I wondered what they would have done if it had rained. The entire audience stayed involved in the action throughout, got all the jokes, and were never restless.

Jack Shepherd directed *Two Gentlemen* briskly, with Mary Rylance, the young Artistic Director of the Globe, playing Proteus. Shepherd did not always use the space well; there was too little playing to the sides, for example, and a tendency for actors to line up between the two columns supporting the heavens. But no doubt he, and the rest of the company, will come to explore the space, and its potential, in future productions. Costumes, designed by Susan Coates, were modern, no doubt to save money, but were in keeping with the Elizabethan practice of not being much concerned with historical accuracy. The young, multiracial, multinational (there were a few Americans among the Brits) cast were lively and effective. Although the London critics tended to be condescending toward the production (probably because somebody got the bright idea of *not* providing free press tickets, a petty way of raising a little extra money), it was actually impressive, perhaps not equal to the best at the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre, but far above their worst. Doing a minor Shakespeare play at the outset, rather than leaping into the raging seas of *King Lear* or *Hamlet*, was a wise idea. I shall go back to report on their first full season, which is scheduled for next summer.

JOHN LOUGHERY

The Flag: Waving, Burning, Provoking

ON THE FACE OF IT, THE AMERICAN FLAG doesn't sound like the most promising theme for an art exhibition. Shrill diatribe and cornball sentimentality are the ultimate rock and a hard place. There was an excellent show of Childe Hassam's World War I flag paintings at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. several years ago, though its success had more to do with Impressionist brushwork and a well-rendered urban setting than with any advanced social or historical ideas. At the other extreme was "Dred" Scott Tyler's rumpus in 1988 at the Chicago Art Institute, with his invitation to walk on Betsy Ross's creation in his conceptual art piece (or floor piece), *What Is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?* While it wasn't likely to win friends at the D.A.R. or have the American Legion up in arms, "Consensus & Conflict: The Flag in American Art" at the Whitney Museum's Stamford, Connecticut branch last summer was on the whole an absorbing experience, problems and all.

The first problem (and this won't surprise anyone) was that we were given a lot more conflict than consensus. George Luks's rich, paint-frenzied *Armistice Night* (1918) had to stand in for a few too many other pictures; a Childe Hassam and at least three or four other works were needed to convey the spirit of that earlier day when waving the flag was not a suspect activity. It's not a question of balance—one flag-positive image for every flag-negative image—so much as it is a question of momentum, or historical progression. Before the national mood darkened, a change which can be traced to Wilson's empty rhetoric or Jazz-Age greed or Sacco & Vanzetti or the Great Depression (or any ten other moments), the American public and most artists shared a faith in this country's destiny. The flag was an emblem then of the best political values imaginable. If you're Newt Gingrich, that time was the golden age. If you're Howard Zinn, it was an era of reckless naiveté. The point is, the overwhelming sense of failed promise came later, and "Consensus and Conflict" should have more amply reflected the ebullient days of patriotism, leading us gradually and inexorably to present-day skepticism and anger. Curators of contemporary shows with a political thrust are, in this viewer's experience, too eager to jump to the later, dramatic, hard-boiled work in their exhibitions when they should be guiding us by degrees toward their evocation of the Zeitgeist. The pace of the story was a little off in Stamford.

A few of the selections were a little off, too. Larry Rivers, Robert

Colescott, and Betye Saar still have a walloping effect, and the high points of this show were very high indeed, ranging from the obvious (Dorothea Lange) to the little-known (Wood Gaylor). But Jasper Johns's drawing and lithograph were dishwasher-dull—real throwaways—and Robert Rauschenberg's seriograph *Signs* (1970), with its fragments of flags and anti-Viet Nam demonstrators and JFK's head and Martin Luther King, Jr., in his coffin, is worse than glib: it's a snoozer. An exhibition that is going to consist of only fifty-odd works has no room for filler. Finally, relentlessly, there was the tone of the catalogue-brochure. Wood Gaylor, for instance, was represented in the show by two small, eerie paintings that leave room for myriad responses. *Bob's Party, Number 1* (1918) depicts, in what used to be called a "primitive art" style—and good riddance to that term—a hall bedecked with a big flag and filled with an odd, ribald, enchanting assortment of partygoers, including men in costume, half-nude women on parade, a lesbian in a tie and jacket. *Off to Europe* (1925) shows the bow of a departing ocean liner, flags flying and tourists and soon-to-be expatriates cavorting. But about the latter painting, the brochure noted only that the picture "reveals Gaylor's complicity with the dominant cultural group and reinforces the historical gloss [i.e., "Roaring Twenties" mythology] that typifies interpretations of the 1920s." The only reaction a sentence so leaden can inspire is, all right, why don't we just burn the damn picture? I write as someone who has used the words "politically correct" no more than three times in his life, leaving them to the Pat Buchanans and the Phil Gramms, and who found much to applaud in the Smithsonian's "America as West" extravaganza. But we are in a sad way when curators give the impression that they have selected an interesting work of art for an exhibition *solely* to beat the artist over the head with a thesis, even one that has a wisp of truth to it. There is a great deal more going on in *Off to Europe* than the curator's description implies—there are moments of unease in this painting, of strange disconnections—and plenty to be said about its craftsmanship and its perfectly legitimate subject matter. This kind of reductive analysis is on the order of deciding that *Tobacco Road* is better than *The Great Gatsby* because Caldwell wrote about poor people and Fitzgerald didn't, that Florine Stettheimer was just another capitalist pig, and Wallace Stevens no better than Warren Harding. I also have a hard time believing that the man who painted the nutty, vivacious, and possibly sinister *Bob's Party* was simply a witless advocate of "the ideology of the dominant class." The witlessness lies elsewhere.

Having said all that, I wouldn't have missed the show for the world. It touched on all the current perspectives that the topic calls for, from the elegiac (Larry Rivers' *The Last Civil War Veteran* of 1959 fading away before our eyes) to the bitterly comic (Robert Colescott's *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* with Uncle Ben and Aunt Jemima aboard) to the earnest (George Grosz, John Steuart Curry) and bombastic (Barbara Kruger). There was something wonderful and wicked about putting *Fourth of July Parade, Bridgeport* (1947) by Stevan Dohanos,

a Norman Rockwell wannabe, next to Paul Cadmus' *Fantasia on a Theme By Dr. S* (1946)—they obviously had very different experiences of the forties, and Cadmus' emphasis on sailor beefcake and predatory homosexuals in a tacky boardwalk milieu feels a hundred times more authentic than Dohanos' smarm. Dohanos' details reinforce a cardboard house and cardboard emotions; Cadmus' details are subtle and acid-funny. Several black-and-white photographs in the show even more effectively chronicled the gap between professed ideals and grim realities, which the flag often seems to speak to. Gordon Parks's *American Gothic, Washington, D.C.* (1942) takes Grant Wood's hokum and transfers it to another, more truly pinched setting; a thin, bespectacled black woman in a housedress, standing before a flag, holds a mop and a broom aloft. Diane Arbus' patriot is a man in an Uncle Sam outfit in a vacant inner-city lot. A spare scene from Larry Clark's "Tulsa" series (1972) evokes the violent despair of the dispossessed male as he faces the world with only his pistol and his flag, while Robert Mapplethorpe's frayed, sun-bleached piece of cloth in *American Flag* (1977) just as tersely captures the decline in prestige of the years after America's ignominious defeat in Asia. It comes as something of a shock to remember that Mapplethorpe ever labored over images that weren't melodramatic or lurid, but were simply sad, honest, and painfully accurate.

The many works from the early 1990s, created hot on the heels of the flag-burning amendment controversy which took two Supreme Court rulings to clarify (a symbol is a symbol is a symbol, folks), suggest that modern American artists were as reluctant to let go of the issue as the President and the Congress. The rhetoric has clogged the body politic (Donald Lipski's flag stuck into a clear glass plumbing pipe), betrayed Thomas Jefferson's words (Dui Seid's altar of charred books and censored papers), and, in Hans Haacke's 1991 *Collateral*, a shopping cart overflowing with flag buttons, become the easiest means for politicians to cash in on a cheap appeal to mob prejudice. A useful notion for the Stamford show to dwell on in visual terms: when a symbol is elevated to a position higher than the idea it was meant to symbolize, when anger at dissent matters more than knowledge of what the Constitution has to say about dissent, we are all in trouble.

The complaint is sometimes heard that artists these days are too interested in portraying the underside of life, that cynicism—or at least an anti-idealism—pervades the visual arts scene. The grand Toulouse-Lautrec show at the Metropolitan Museum and the small show of Paul Cadmus' sailor paintings at the Whitney pointed out that such has always been the case as far as the Modernist era is concerned. The 1890s world of "la belle epoque" according to Lautrec and 1940s America as Cadmus examines it are hardly less seedy than anything that caught the eye of Diane Arbus and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Lautrec was seen at the Met exclusively through the museum's own holdings, and who knew that in every medium this artist was so well

represented in New York? One hundred-odd oils, chalk drawings, posters, and prints managed to convey a good deal of his range. The exhibition began in a sort of foyer with a small 1887 oil-on-wood rendering of a friend, Albert Grenier, a quiet picture that bespeaks an extraordinary feel for line and color. Having mischievously lulled us into an aesthetic reverie, the curators then proceeded to occupy us—bombard us, really—with glimpses of elegant debauchery, tales of sex-for-hire, and erotically charged studies in contrast, several galleries' worth. The contrasts especially, honing in on the gap between a self-consciously cosmopolitan veneer and a grubby reality, never ceased to interest Lautrec, and it is a measure of his greatness that he was always seeking ways to explore that topic while avoiding the ponderousness of an exposé or a tract. *Englishman at the Moulin Rouge* (1892), for instance, is about power and predatory maleness in more than just its setting or the placement of the figures. The two women on the left, the "property" in this equation, are sketched in, given no more than the approximate humanity or individuality the "buyer"—horny tourist or, for that matter, eager art collector—would accord them. And nothing is so "done" in this oil and gouache on board, so amply rendered and *un*-sketched in, as the Englishman's hand, front and center, grasping his cane and gloves at the moment, soon to be grasping the flesh he has purchased for the night. In the color lithograph *The Photographer Sescou* (1894), the bent-over, legs-apart, thrust-forward posture of the cameraman, lens straining toward the woman he is "capturing" on film, is only a slightly more comic version of the same dance, motivated by the same drive to see, penetrate, and possess. In the 1990s, we have lost the edge Lautrec would have had in his time, we often feel the art but not the smut—and that is unfortunate if inevitable. For few artists have been as wittily but still oppressively taken with scraping the bottom of the barrel of our sexual psyches, a realm that never changes. The exhibition at the Met was tautly focused in this regard: for Lautrec, sex was everywhere, and it wasn't a pretty story. In the lithographs from the 1896 Lebaudy trial, his women's pointy chins are as salacious as his prostitutes' bottoms. The role-playing is not restricted to the insides of the theaters of Montmartre and, unlike a Feydeau farce, all does not end happily.

Role-playing figures prominently in Paul Cadmus as well, and it was a smart decision at the Whitney to focus on the sailor paintings in this one-gallery lobby exhibition. In his "Seven Deadly Sins" series, Cadmus is apt to come off as lurid rather than profound, and en masse there is a cloying quality to his nudes or portraits. The sailor paintings, though, take place in the messy "real world" of the city and allow for more inventive, or at least busier, compositions. They also allow for a smidgen of humor. These boys on shore leave, their rumps bursting the seams of their government-issued navy uniforms, are alternately paradigms of macho swagger (as they make contact with assorted floozies) or innocents abroad (as they miss the gay pickups all around them on Riverside Drive)—or, in some cases, highly sensitive participants in the sexually

coded theatrics of park-bench encounters and trysts in the grass, heterosexual and homosexual. Cadmus' drawing is tight and, next to the fluid line of Lautrec, his pictures feel heavy and airless. He has no use for open space or the sketchy, suggestive detail. But perhaps this fits the subject matter, after all: the un-sensuous, robot-like aura of Cadmus' men and women as they attempt to find sexual release or blow off steam or make a little easy money could well be intended. The pattern of their coupling is always the same, and it involves precious little joy or independent action.

The art of Paul Cadmus and Toulouse-Lautrec is about an immersion in one's time and, especially in the latter case, a simultaneous transcendence of "social chronicle" by a high level of graphic skill. "Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven," organized by the San Diego Museum of Art and on view at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston last summer, was about something altogether different. In 1887 Camille Pissarro wrote to his son about the affluent-stockbroker-turned-penniless-painter, "Gauguin is gone . . . completely disappeared . . . but I hear that this summer at the seashore he laid down the law to a group of young disciples, who hung on the words of the master, that austere sectarian. At any rate, it must be admitted that he has finally acquired great influence." The Boston show, with 150 paintings, works on paper, and wood reliefs, documented that influence—a determined movement away from anecdotal themes and social commentary, from urban life and modern notions of progress, from psychology, even from Impressionism itself—as well as the idealistic quest of the man who abandoned "Babylon Paris" to find new inspiration in Brittany and later in Tahiti. Cadmus and Lautrec's pursuit and analysis of the tawdry, invigorating here-and-now was, in the end, a repugnant goal to Paul Gauguin.

What was he after in leaving the big city for the rugged shore of Pont-Aven? What were the lessons he imparted to the painters who gathered round him there? Pissarro, a smarter man than most of his contemporaries, had it right with the phrase "austere sectarian." Gauguin's mission was both a harsh and a spiritual, even heretical one, a rejection of industrialized Europe (as if such a thing were possible) and a search for meaningful essences and earlier truths, an uncluttered state of mind worth painting and believing in. On the northwest coast of France, a usable setting presented itself—a dramatic landscape, a culture still touched by Celtic myths and an overwrought Catholicism, and, ready to pose in traditional costumes, peasants whose language was equally exotic, more Welsh than French. The best description of what he wished to do there, and why it could not be done in Paris, was Gauguin's: "When my wooden clogs strike the granite ground, I hear the muffled, hollow, and powerful tone that I try to achieve in painting." Church music, mystical chants, faith and nature. The dead hand of realism, the surface flash of Impressionism, the quasi-science of Poincaré were all to be left behind with the stock-market ledgers and the smart café talk.

"Cloisonnism" was the first term applied to the style that Gauguin, Emile Bernard, Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, and several others evolved, and the allusion to the medieval enamelwork of flat, bright colors contoured by strips of metal is apt. The effect of Gauguin's *The Young Christian Girl* (1894) or Bernard's *The Buckwheat Harvest* (1888) is closer to stained glass windows than to anything by Monet or Renoir. "Synthetism," implying a synthesis of observation and imagination, was a less fortunate term contemporary critics used, though its artificial, even stagey quality is not irrelevant, either, to what it was describing. Indeed, the two terms emphasize the bind Gauguin and his peers and pupils were placing themselves in, forging an aesthetic that looked to a highly intellectualized future (synthetism) as much as to a more elemental past (cloisonnism). The subtext of this exhibition, in fact, was the forced, romantic nature of the venture. There was no enduring haven to be found in exoticism or "primitivism," as it turned out. For educated, nineteenth-century Europeans, there was no escaping to another plane, least of all in their own backyard. Those quaintly attired peasants are posing, after all, and the vast majority of pictures in "Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven" are secondhand fairy tales. Images of exquisite color and single-minded focus, to a viewer of the late twentieth century, portals to a renewal of a dying art form—but that is not quite what Gauguin intended, any more than fellow rebels like Synge and Lawrence intended to write likeable, offbeat stories.

Sumptuousness, though, we had plenty of in the exhibition, from the claret-red walls (designed to recreate the walls of the Café Volpini where the Pont-Aven group had its first show—almost distractingly beautiful) to the display of zincographs by Gauguin and Bernard, grainy prints made on zinc plates rather than lithographic stones and on canary-yellow rather than white paper. Woodcuts and oils, ink drawings and glazed stoneware, seascapes and laundresses, fruit and children and bathers: the range of media and subject matter, too, was more varied than one might expect. In some ways, this was the healthiest lesson Gauguin had to convey to anyone who set up camp with him. The idea of simplified forms and large patches of solid color, shallow space and visceral impact, was crucial, but at least as important was the abandonment of traditional ideas of hierarchy in art. All forms of expression counted, a carving no less than a drawing. Sincerity mattered more than cleverness or even originality of composition—"the authentic" was the elusive Holy Grail here—and part of the strategy in violating the concept of painting-as-window-on-the-world was to educate oneself, and the viewer, away from museum categories and urbane distinctions.

Though it is probably not what the curators had in mind, it didn't seem inappropriate to me that the "school" in this exhibition ended up holding my interest more than the "schoolmaster." The flatness and earnestness of Gauguin ultimately wears me down, and the four-man pantheon of Post-Impressionism, writ in stone though it may be in art history, gets a little tiring, too. (To gear oneself up to respond with *equal*

excitement, and with no personal biases intruding, toward the stately Seurat, the hyper-tense van Gogh, the decorative Gauguin, and the robustly contemplative Cézanne has always seemed to me to err on the side of textbook-responsiveness, anyway. Big names, especially when bound under a common rubric, leave scant space for honest viewer reactions. Is it possible to see all four as equivalently successful, equivalently stirring?) But there was great pleasure to be had in Boston last summer in examining the art of Jacob Meyer de Haan or Henri Moret or Charles Laval or any of the ten other “disciples” who were really men of accomplishment in their own right, anti-academics one and all. To forsake complexity and bravura brushwork while avoiding amateurishness is very hard to do. And Roderic O’Conor? To learn that there *was* an Irish Post-Impressionist in the 1890s, pushing at the boundaries of “reasonable” color and texture, saturating his canvases with thick, bright pigment, a man gone mad about shades of red, was almost worth the trip in itself. He didn’t seem to have much to do with disenchantment and salvation, those big implicit Pont-Aven themes, but I loved him all the same.

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

Poems, Mostly Personal, Some Historical, Many Unnecessary

LATE IN HIS CAREER HENRY JAMES ATTENDED A GARDEN PARTY given by Edith Wharton. A dowager approached him: "Aren't you Henry James?" "Yes, Madame, I admit I am." "We met in Paris when you were a young man. Tell me, have you kept up with your writing?"

The anecdote is amusing, of course, because of the very notion of Henry James "keeping up" with his writing. But there are some writers, even poets, with whom it is difficult for the reader to keep up. There is the ancient argument, of course, that no writer writes too much—time will decide which were the good books, which the bad. No one today faults James, Balzac, Dostoevsky, or even Trollope for writing too much. But perhaps there is a different standard for poetry, which is supposed to be the best words in the best order (Coleridge), or a fresh look and a fresh listen (Frost).

In his first book, *Ommateum* (1955), A. R. Ammons mused,

(I'm waiting to hear if
Cornell will give me
a job: I need
to work &
maybe I write
too much)

Maybe? What we have before us is the poet's twenty-third collection in forty-one years, many of them sizeable. His *Collected Poems 1951–1971* was nearly 400 pages. *The Snow Poems*, a single volume (1977) was 292 pages. Ammons of course has written some wonderful work, and unlike many of our older poets (he is seventy this year), shows no sense of flagging. His *Garbage* (1993) deserved the National Book Award it received. But Ammons, like Whitman and D. H. Lawrence in the free-verse tradition and Richard Eberhart and Delmore Schwartz in the formal tradition, hasn't a clue to which are his good poems and which not so good. His work is maddeningly uneven—nowhere more evidently so than in *Brink Road*.¹

Coming just three years after *Garbage*, the current enterprise consists

¹ BRINK ROAD, by A. R. Ammons. W. W. Norton. \$23.00.

of 153 poems, none of which has appeared previously in book form. (To be fair, not all were recently written. Some date as far back as 1973.) Once again Ammons is the master of the “walk poem.” Every crossing of the yard or walking the dunes reveals some natural phenomenon to be commented upon. In a review Laurence Lieberman—a wonderful critic—has mischievously suggested that Ammons on his nature walks is “just a bit too deliberate about pouncing on any and every instance or insect or incident (as if words and bugs and events are, finally, just various equally assimilable species of poem parts) . . . ” True, but in the very best of Ammons’ nature poems the images fall into metaphors for being and spirituality, language and mortality. A path a stream makes reminds the poet of his own ways, animals’ protective coloration are like poems, and a sawtooth leaf is a figure for the powers of reason.

On the other hand, what is one to make of this one-line poem (“The Story”):

Oblivion keeps the caterpillar bright.

Or this ten-liner (“Old Geezer”):

The quickest
way
to change

the
world is
to

like it
the
way it

is.

I doubt many will feel compelled to read this often in the future. And while Richard Howard has lavished praise upon Ammons for his masterful use of enjambment, two lines ending with the word “the” is two too many.

On the positive side, the book concludes with “Summer Place,” a pleasant forty-five-page poem in tercets, occasioned by the poet’s summer vacation and correspondences. Along the way he ruminates upon his intentions in writing *Sphere* (1974), the chain of decisions one decision provokes, and of course numerous amoebas and ants and other clever insects. He admits to finding the ocean more sobering than Wallace Stevens, and in this poem Ammons continues his modest stance, tells us he doesn’t know how to write a poem. But clearly he does. He just writes too many of them which are alike.

If it seems churlish to criticize Ammons, what are we to make of the late William Stafford (d. 1993)? His 268-page new and collected poems, *Stories That Could Be True* (1977), was but one of over fifty books in a lifetime of work. The majority of these were chapbooks which appeared between his full-length collections. Now the poems in Stafford's small press volumes are being collected. Two already have appeared: *Smoke's Way* (Graywolf Press, 1983) and *My Name Is William Tell* (Confluence Press, 1992). The third and latest is *Even in Quiet Places*, 107 pages of poems with an Afterword by Kim Stafford.²

James Dickey once wrote, "There are poets who pour out rivers of ink, all on good poems. William Stafford is one of these." But that was in 1960. Surely Stafford was capable of writing a less than good poem? Take, for instance, some of the later ones, like "Guitar String" and "Maybe," which read like Stafford writing a Stafford parody. Or a poem like "Accountability," which seems unfinished or dashed-out. Some of the poems in *Even in Quiet Places* are marred, for me, by Stafford's overreaching in his empathy in the use of pathetic fallacy: trees are afraid of storms, creeks tell stories, a rock finds what it likes, and so forth. Sometimes it works well, as in the concluding line of a lovely poem, "Ask Me." But other times it's mawkish, as in "I'm Any Old Tree" ("I am old and alone. / I built my house on the sand. My limbs are tired, / want to rest on the ground . . ."). Some of this sounds like that old popular tune, "Every little breeze seems to whisper 'Louise.'"

To be sure, there are some fine firm poems here, in the quiet and unpretentious manner of Stafford's best work. These include "It Returns at Times," "Poetry," "History Display," and "Deep Light." But the poet's heirs may not be doing Stafford's reputation much good by continuing to issue uncollected work which largely illustrates his low energy level and the narrowness of his range. Stafford himself probably would not mind. He used to tell his writing students that there was no such thing as writer's block if you were willing to lower your standards. In any case Stafford is better served by the selected poems edited by Robert Bly, *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep* (HarperCollins, 1993).

Nor am I convinced that the poetic reputation of Jane Kenyon will be served well by the overly-ample new and selected poems she arranged before her death, from leukemia, in 1995.³ Hers was a rather limited vision, and assembling over 200 pages of work from four previous books, plus twenty late poems, only accentuates the repetitiveness into which she often fell. There simply are far too many poems about taking a walk with her dog or observing the flowers. If Ammons is master of the walk poem, she was mistress. Too many of the poems catalogue I-did-this, I-did-that, reading like the lists of a bucolic Frank O'Hara—a female Frank O'Hara in green pastures rather than in Greenwich Village. Too many poems reflect on the contents of the daily mail, feeling out of

² EVEN IN QUIET PLACES, by William Stafford. Confluence Press. \$20.00.

³ OTHERWISE: New & Selected Poems, by Jane Kenyon. Graywolf Press. \$23.95.

place in her husband's ancestral home, her father's death. Too many, such as "Main Street: Tilton, New Hampshire," seem to be just notes and observations. Too many, such as "Deer Season," leave the reader asking, "So what?"

Ms. Kenyon would have been better served by a slender, rigid selection such as Bly made of Stafford, focussing largely on her *Constance* poems, published in book form in 1993, and her uncollected later poems dealing with her depressions and leukemia, and her husband Donald Hall's fight with liver cancer. Not unlike Sylvia Plath, Ms. Kenyon came into her own on dreaded subjects, and wrote a handful of remarkable poems—"Otherwise," "Notes from the Other Side," "Pharaoh," "Back," "Chrysanthemums," "Having It Out with Melancholy," "The Pear," and especially "Depression in Winter." These are poems that accomplish far more than cataloguing.

And yet: it must be said Kenyon was capable of positing some striking images. While her work rarely used meter or form, she had a true gift for metaphor. A house is "quiet / as a face paralyzed by strokes," beavers move through water "like thoughts in an unconflicted mind," the first shoots of asparagus rise like "the fingers of Lazarus." The latter recalls that some of her best work is rooted in the Christian tradition, such as the hymn-like "Let Evening Come." Yet in "Depression" she equates the title subject with Christianity, and one is left wondering why. She could be imprecise, as when she spoke of grasses being "beheaded" by haying. Since when do blades of grass have heads? The poet's premature death at age forty-eight will deprive us of seeing what else she might have achieved in her true poetic maturity.

The dust jacket for Denise Levertov's twenty-second collection claims the book shows the poet at the height of her powers.⁴ Would that it were so. Reading this book is akin to experiencing a recital late in Maria Callas' career. You attend because you respect the artistry—but the voice seems to be gone. Nowhere in this collection is there the precise language of *The Jacob's Ladder* (1961) or *O Taste and See* (1964)—books which compared favorably with H.D. for their imagery and Neruda for their enjoyment. Nor does this latest book show the engagement of "The Olga Poems" from *The Sorrow Dance* (1966).

What we have, instead, is a series of poems, mostly brief, which read like notes for poems. The language is ordinary—traffic is "chaotic," night is "still," ropes are "frayed," doves are either "mournful" or "crooning," pilgrims are "faithful." When Levertov does attempt language that is other than commonplace, she errs too far in the opposite direction. We then are given "oneiromancy," "opaline," "agon," "anamnesis," "pentimento," "appoggiatura," "esemplastic," "magma," and "epiphytes." Some poems, such as "Sojourn in the Parallel World," are composed of nothing but generalities—"passions," "cruelties,"

⁴ SANDS OF THE WELL, by Denise Levertov. New Directions. \$20.95.

“dreams,” “concepts,” “crimes,” “nature,” “obsessions,” “pure response.” Others are totally void of image or metaphor, such as “In Private,” quoted here in its entirety:

He silent and angry,
she silent and afraid, each looking
out the cab windows,
he to the left, she to the right,
both dressed for winter, driving
somewhere neither wants to go.

Aside from the line breaks, what argument can be made that this is poetry rather than prose? It could be a paragraph from a Jean Rhys novel.

The book's themes are nature, music, memory, belief and aging, but there are few poems here which belong with the considerable Levertov canon. They include “A Wren,” “Like Noah's Rainbow,” “The Cult of Relics,” and “Advising Myself.” In the latter the poet admits to not feeling and seeing as intensely as she once did. For decades I've thought Denise Leverov deserved to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. But not for this book. (New Directions made a pretty package of it, though.)

Like Jane Kenyon, Alicia Suskin Ostriker writes poems born out of tragedy and illness—but only some. Her eighth book of poetry, *The Crack in Everything*,⁵ also contains poems of sheer joy (“The Dogs at Live Oaks Beach, Santa Cruz,” “The Vocabulary of Joy”), poems of politics (“The Russian Army Goes Into Batu,” “The Eighth and Thirteenth,” “Somalia”), poems of sociology (“The Boys, the Broom Handle, the Retarded Girl,” “The Class”). Still others are about art and artists, including poems informing works by van Gogh and Duchamp, a marvelous interpretation of the origins of poet May Swenson's particularity and curiosity, and an homage to painter Alice Neel which uses words the way Neel used flesh and colors (“... you find yourself secretly peeking / Through the windowbars at menstrual red sunsets”). The poem also explores aspects of Neel's life to which I had not been privy:

The thing about life in the bughouse, says Alice Neel,
Is it's better than killing yourself. And you get some rest.

What is most impressive about this volume is the poet's range, not only of subject matter—as mentioned above—but tone. Ostriker is as comfortable writing about Babi Yar (if comfortable could be the word!) as she is cracking Jewish jokes: “Where he came from, if you saw a Jew / eating a chicken, you knew one of them was sick.” Elsewhere she has one of her students quip, “My father hits the bottle ... / And my mother.”

⁵ THE CRACK IN EVERYTHING, by Alicia Suskin Ostriker. University of Pittsburgh Press. \$24.95; \$10.95.

One protagonist admits, "We're married this long / Because we are both too stubborn / To admit we made a mistake."

But humor for this poet is more than a cheap shot, as in the painful pun which gives poignancy to these lines from the last, and most moving, section of the book, about the poet's mastectomy:

A breast surgeon minces something other
than language.
That's why I picked you to cut me.

These last dozen poems about the poet's medical history and psychological recovery are fresh, brave, and unself-pitying. ("I've resolved / to be as sexy with one breast / As other people are with two.") Like Bishop, Plath and Sexton, Ostriker occasionally resorts to nursery-rhymery to avoid pathos: "A-tisket a-tasket / I'm out of my casket." She also creates unforgettable similes and metaphors: "the drug sent me away, like the unemployed"; a stepfather is "rigid as the bedrock of Manhattan." As opposed to the Kenyon and Levertov collections, there is only a single poem in this entire volume I feel too casual, too occasional ("Frowning at Emily"). Alicia Suskin Ostriker deserves a wider reputation as one of our finest poets.

It took me a long time to complete reading Laurence Lieberman's *Dark Songs: Slave House and Synagogue*.⁶ True, as single collections go, it is long (135 pages). But length had little to do with it. It was only after the third day or so of reading, when I awoke from a terrible nightmare, that I realized Lieberman's subject matter subconsciously was disturbing me. Dark songs indeed!

The book ranges over the history of the eastern Caribbean islands from the eighteenth century to Reagan's Caribbean rescue of 1983. As such, its subjects include slavery and the hacking off of a runaway slave's head, the mass suicide of members of the Carib tribe, attacks on Dutch Jews, the murder of Maurice Bishop, the Pumpkin Hill Massacre, near-death from peritonitis, a man who removes shrapnel from his own innards, the slaughter of thousands of island monkeys, and images of dismembered body parts after the Grenada invasion. This is heavy going, and only in the book's final section, "The St. Kitts Monkey Feuds," does Lieberman treat his subject with a mixture of reality and satire. Only here does he occasionally allow humor to distance himself from the gore. Speaking of attempts to justify the primate slaughter, he writes,

... All current Star Testimonies
agree! Monkey's choice Manna for long-distance runners,
swimmers, bikers & muscly body builders ...

⁶ DARK SONGS: *Slave House and Synagogue*, by Laurence Lieberman. The University of Arkansas Press. \$22.00; \$14.00.

Otherwise the book is an intense mixture of history, news, and observation.

I'm not sure I would know a Lieberman poem were I to hear it, but I would surely know it was his by the look on the page. From stanzas that resemble George Herbert's concrete verses in "Easter Wings," to others that resemble Dylan Thomas' "Vision and Prayer" poems, Lieberman's verses rarely conform to flush-left stanzas. His closest model would be Marianne Moore. Sometimes the stanzas are roughly syllabic, their line lengths making sense. Other times the choice seems arbitrary and results in some unfortunate enjambments. What principle for instance can govern such awkward breaks as these?:

He'd won permission from Chief

Forest Ranger

Quinn to cut three cedar timbers from densely wooded
Chance's Peak . . .

The poems shift from first- to third-person narratives, giving the book variety in tone and voice. The poet handles island vernacular well. And there are some deft ironies: A female survivor of the Grenada invasion tells how none of her linens on the clothesline were soiled in the four-days' war. Whole sections of poems are moving, such as "Smuggled Pencil Stubs" and "Life Shock." In the latter Lieberman harrowingly portrays what it is like to be liberated from prison after one has become spiritually dead, to suffer not culture shock but life shock, "corpse-stunned-alive syndrome." "White Tiger and the Mosquitos" in its entirety is highly arresting, particularly its vivid portrayal of a World War II pilot being shot down.

In his Preface to his 1977 critical collection, *Unassigned Frequencies*, Lieberman spoke of the books he craved as being "the ones that compelled me to stretch myself beyond my usual limits, to cultivate unexplored faculties of readership." I suspect for many he himself has now written such a book. In his ninth collection he has not repeated himself, and has undertaken large new subjects.

Another book with historical roots is David R. Slavitt's *A Gift: The Life of Da Ponte*.⁷ The jacket copy calls the book, among other things, an "Epic poem." The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *The Dynasts* are epic poems. At 54 pages, *A Gift* is no epic—though it is an extended narrative poem that treats a single heroic figure and concerns historical events. The poem deals with the life, successes and failures, of Mozart's librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, a figure largely ignored to this day. (My edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has not one mention of him.)

A translator of Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Avianus, as well as a writer of

⁷ A GIFT: The Life of da Ponte. A Poem, by David R. Slavitt. Louisiana State University Press. \$16.95; \$9.95.

over ten volumes of his own poetry, Slavitt is a poet who gives care and attention to his craft. He also possesses great wit, as when da Ponte applies for a position as Burgtheater Poet. Appearing before Emperor Joseph II, the scene is played as follows:

“How many
plays have you written, Signore?” His Majesty asks.
“None, Sire.” (This, in terror.)

The Emperor
smiles and jokes: “Splendid. A virgin muse.”

The virgin learned soon enough the whorey tricks:
Adaptation, translation, theft . . .

Unfortunately, Slavitt’s rendering of this scene is an exception. Too much of the poem is narration rather than dramatization. Slavitt breaks the old rule of *Show, don’t tell*. What are described as “the best days of his life,” a love affair between da Ponte and a gorgeous innkeeper, is dispensed with in 19 lines, with no description or delineation of da Ponte’s beloved other than “gorgeous.” There are no love scenes, no exchanges of dialogue. Slavitt’s treatment of Mozart is more generous, albeit what has become the stock take via Peter Shaffer’s *Amadeus*. Slavitt’s Mozart also is a boor with “a fondness for crude jokes.” Slavitt does develop Mozart’s distaste for rhymes, and da Ponte’s refusal to yield to his will:

Rhymes, at times like chimes; their ringing
into his head was a way of bringing
the balance of honor back toward level.
Let Mozart hate them and go to the devil.

But too often in this poem I wanted to see and hear Soler, Salieri, Constanze Mozart, Leopold Mozart, Archbishop Colloredo—all nowhere mentioned. I wanted to relive the Columbia College of 1825, where the aging librettist ended up teaching Italian. What did it look like, sound like, smell like?

It is possible Slavitt wished to remain totally within the consciousness of his subject. If so, he is successful. We feel for da Ponte’s doubts, his early loss of his teeth, his uncanny ability always to be in the wrong place at the right time, to assume unknowingly his friends’ debts, and his poverty and ignominy—even when his works have, unbeknownst to him, been remounted with success in London, and he is praised for his translation skills by Lord Byron. As the jacket copy suggests—this time rightly—“Ultimately Lorenzo da Ponte is a hero, his life a victory.” This is a fine book. I wish it had been written more fully (more Epic?) in its treatment of its fascinating subject.

Miller Williams, who is published in the Illinois Poetry Series selected

and edited by Laurence Lieberman, is a very different poet from the author of Lieberman's Caribbean poems. He differs technically—his poems are formal and rhymed or slant-rhymed (nature/murder, future/order, frost/first, uses/hypotenuses). And he differs thematically. Whereas Lieberman takes on big historical moments and national concerns, Williams confronts the small moments which compose everyday life. *Points of Departure*⁸ is full of human emotions of loneliness, confusion, consolation, regret, and nostalgia.

The first section is composed of lyrics, some very brief, but mostly all effective. I'm reminded of J. V. Cunningham's epigrams when Williams is rapier-sharp, as in "To One Who Went Too Far," quoted in its entirety:

No use to look for signs of old affection.
Some roads run in only one direction.

A few poems in this selection may read like light verse, among them "Muse of the Evening" and "Home Young from Europe with All New Underwear." But it was no less than W. H. Auden who wrote, "I suspect that without some undertone of the comic, genuine serious verse cannot be written today." And Miller Williams writes genuine serious verse. A few poems go beyond human concerns and contemplate the supernatural.

In the second section the poet places ten poems about a character called Jonathan. Cautious and aging, living alone with a cat, Jonathan becomes a real personality, one perhaps to join the ranks of John Berryman's Henry, Weldon Kees's Robinson, and William Meredith's Hazard.

Section III is a return to individual lyrics, some longer and many with a range wider than in Section I. There is a monologue by the Biblical Jonah, an interior monologue by a young college instructor, interior dialogues by partners in a marriage, and a moving soliloquy by a dutiful daughter who also happens to be a lesbian. Miller Williams touches us where we live.

And finally, Czeslaw Milosz's latest collection is an autumnal affair.⁹ Everywhere there are references to older age, changed facial and bodily appearances, altered landscapes. One of the strongest poems is about Adam's expulsion from the garden. In another Milosz likens his life to a blown-out tire on the side of the road. Heraclitus told us we cannot step into the same river twice, and that basically is the theme of *Facing the River*, Milosz's new poems translated by the poet and Robert Hass. The river is that of the Issa Valley of the poet's childhood, which he left

⁸ POINTS OF DEPARTURE, by *Miller Williams*. University of Illinois Press. \$18.95; \$12.95.

⁹ FACING THE RIVER: New Poems, by *Czeslaw Milosz*. Trans. by *Czeslaw Milosz* and *Robert Hass*. The Ecco Press. \$13.00p.

over a half century ago. But in the spring of 1989 the new government of independent Lithuania invited him to return.

In nostalgic poem after nostalgic poem, Milosz reminisces on his first communion, a manor house now missing, the former clarity of the river—its color now “that of reddish automobile oil,” the lush meadows and wildflowers, and of course former companions—including one Zosia and one Wanda Telakowska (a painter specializing in color woodcuts). The river of the title is at once the stream of consciousness, the river of mythology, and especially the river of time, from which none of us can escape. He tells us that the second name of History is Annihilation, and there is a strongly-felt poem on Sarajevo. Yet the poet is not rueful:

Rejoice! Give thanks! I raised my voice
To join them in their choral singing,
Amid their ruffles, collets, and silk skirts,
One of them already, who vanished long ago.
And our song soared up like smoke from a censer.

Everywhere in the book one finds such exclamations of thanksgiving for the good that has been and what will come.

Along the way Milosz posits some positions with which all may not agree. One is that sex is diabolic, and that whoever believes otherwise surrenders to a bad spirit. It is allowed only with one's spouse. Another is that Allen Ginsberg is a great American poet. He forgives Ginsberg his journalistic clichés, his beard and beads, for his “incessant striving.” Other poems unrelated to the return to Lithuania deal with poetry and painting, which he sees as products of self-delusion:

At every sunrise I renounce the doubts of night and greet the new
day of a most precious delusion.

Facing the River is a distinguished book coming late in a distinguished career.

BRUCE BAWER

The Good Soldier

"THE EXISTENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE OF GOD," Paul Johnson writes at the beginning of his new book *The Quest for God*,¹

is the most important question we humans are ever called to answer. If God does exist, and if in consequence we are called to another life when this one ends, a momentous set of consequences follows, which should affect every day, every moment almost, of our earthly existence. Our life then becomes a mere preparation for eternity and must be conducted throughout with our future in view. If, on the other hand, God does not exist, another momentous set of consequences follows. This life then becomes the only one we have, we have no duties or obligations except to ourselves, and we need weigh no other considerations except our own interests and pleasures.

This passage provides a good introduction to Johnson's characteristic way of thinking about religion. He is, for one thing, less likely to focus on the living, mystical experience of God's presence than on the question of what happens after death. Also, even when he tries, as in these opening sentences, to step outside his own traditional Catholicism and to speak in general terms about God and death, he is likely to define these terms in a sectarian fashion. For to say, as he does, that the existence of God necessarily implies that this life is at once a "preparation for eternity" and a test of one's fitness for eternal life, and that one is rewarded or punished postmortem according to one's grade on that test, is to simplify and distort other belief systems to the extent that their eschatology differs from his Church's. (It is also, one might add, to ignore much modern Christian, and even Catholic, theology.)

Johnson, an English Tory polemicist who is the author of such books as *A History of the Jews*, *The Birth of the Modern*, and *Intellectuals*, would have us view *The Quest for God* as an attempt to chronicle his "personal pilgrimage" and to help others with their own spiritual journeys. "I have begun this book," he claims, "to resolve many doubts in my own mind, to clarify my thoughts and to try to define what God means to me and my life. I write it in the expectation that by straightening out my own beliefs, it may help others to straighten out theirs." Yet *The Quest for God*

¹ THE QUEST FOR GOD: A Personal Pilgrimage, by Paul Johnson. HarperCollins. \$24.00.

is anything but the story of a personal pilgrimage. If Johnson came to this project with any doubts or confusions, it is unclear what they were; and if, in the course of writing, he resolved those doubts or straightened out those beliefs, he did so quietly, offstage, and in a way thoroughly in keeping with the theology of the current pontiff. In any event, the very strong impression one receives throughout this book is that Johnson never left home, spiritually speaking. He grew up a traditional Catholic who prayed to saints for souls in purgatory, and he remains one; with minor exceptions, he believes everything the Church calls upon him to believe, and accepts without hesitation the Polish pope's claim of total hegemony. This book is, then, not a quest account but a work of apologetics—a defense not simply of Christianity but of John Paul II-style Roman Catholicism. "You may or may not agree with what John Paul II teaches in some areas," Johnson acknowledges. "But it cannot be denied, even by his critics, that he presents Roman Catholic Christianity, pure and undefiled, in its most uncompromising and rigorous forms, that he makes no concessions whatever to the twentieth century and its hedonism, and that despite this—almost certainly because of this, too—he is listened to and heeded by hundreds of millions throughout the world."

"Pure," "uncompromising," "rigorous," "no concessions": these words point to the attribute that Johnson values most strongly in his religion. He loves the Catholic Church under Karol Wojtyla for "the comfort and security, the stability and certitude, the happiness and the wisdom" that it has given him; it provides a "sense of authority" for people (such as himself) who "need discipline." "The Catholic Church," he notes approvingly, "speaks the language of 'must' and 'will' and 'is' and 'therefore,' not of 'might' and 'maybe' and 'on the other hand.'" A very large number of people require this certitude. They find life complicated and difficult to understand. They are not skilful at working out what it means to them and what they ought to do in all circumstances. . . . they need firm truths to cling to and firm instructions as to their path ahead." Part of the problem with Johnson's celebration of institutional stability, papal preponderancy, and the comfort of archaic certitudes is that Jesus sought not to give his disciples a strictly codified religion but to release them into a radical new life of challenge, discovery, and growth. Johnson insists that Jesus, like the current Pope, was a tough guy when it came to laying down rules for the Christian life. Yet Johnson appears to forget that Jesus characteristically didn't speak in catechisms, which set forth laws and set up barriers, but in parables, by which he sought to help his listeners imaginatively to grasp the kingdom of God.

Johnson compares the Church to another institution of which he is fond (despite its occasional foolishness, arrogance, and injustice): the Army. "The army commands," he states cheerfully, "and I obey." Does the Church demand that he believe in the notoriously inscrutable doctrine (unknown in the early church but made a binding part of Catholic dogma in 1950) that Mary, at her death, was assumed bodily

into heaven? Very well: "I find no difficulty in accepting this teaching. . . . The pope and the collegiate church wills it, so I accept." How to understand such deliberately mindless assent on the part of an intelligent, educated man? Early on, Johnson attributes the rise of twentieth-century totalitarianism to the Western retreat from God; yet what is his "just-following-orders" posture toward his Church but a formula for totalitarian tyranny—and, one might add, a mockery of the idea of spiritual questing? In fact real spiritual questers tend to irk Johnson. So do atheists, about some of whom he complains that "there was evidence of instability and confusion" in their thought. Some of us might suggest that the truth is not easily won and that evidence of instability and confusion—of intellectual groping and even fumbling—is an almost inevitable manifestation of a serious, honest inquiry into higher truths. For Johnson, however, religion does not properly concern itself with such inquiry; it is, rather, about clinging tightly to the propositions set forth by the Roman Curia in a volume Johnson praises and quotes from repeatedly, the new *Catholic Catechism*.

In its broad outlines, *The Quest for God* recalls a work by another English Tory polemicist, C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (1952). Both men begin by presenting the case for God's existence and by discussing—and dismissing—proposed alternatives; both then consider the nature of God and the particulars of Christian faith. While Lewis, in classic Anglican fashion, is more interested in what it means to lead a Christian life, and thus places emphasis on Christian morality and the concept of the Trinity, Johnson, in the manner of many traditional Catholics, is more concerned with what happens when you die, and thus focuses extensively on the four last things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Both books are lucid and vigorous in style, familiar yet patriarchally authoritative in tone, and full of homely images and musty prejudices; Johnson, like the Oxbridgean Lewis, cuts a formidable figure (among the friends he name-drops is Margaret Thatcher), yet is almost endearingly childlike in his enthusiasm for the faith of his fathers (Johnson's comparison of his Church to "a much-loved old teddy bear or a favourite armchair or a smelly old favourite dog" sounds like something Lewis might have come up with) and in his apparent conviction that if you're ingenious enough you can argue people into sharing your religious belief. As with Lewis, moreover, there is something about Johnson's forensic vigor that makes one feel at times that, for all his show of certainty, the person he most wishes to convince of the truth of the orthodox doctrine he is explicating is himself.

Johnson posits two main reasons to believe in God. One is the existence of human conscience, the innate desire to do good to other human beings: God, he insists, is the only possible explanation for the inner voice that tells us what is right to do to others and what is wrong. Yet it seems to me that conscience could easily be explained in evolutionary terms: species whose members do not possess some impulse to care for their fellow members are more likely to die out than

those that do. Besides, recent American experiences with urban crime seem to suggest that young people who are not given moral instruction by parents grow up into conscienceless adults—which means that what we call conscience may not be innate but learned.

In addition to conscience, Johnson identifies another force that “militates against atheism”: fear. As Johnson reminds us frequently, his is a fear-based faith. He recalls admiringly that when he was at school, a priest’s hellfire sermons inspired such trepidation that boys would line up afterwards, shaking with terror, to confess their sins. “For an intellectually self-confident man or woman, with a healthy body and reasonably contented mind, and a job and a sufficient income,” Johnson writes, “atheism is a possible philosophy. But when misfortunes, pain and sorrows arrive, bringing with them fear, and fear not just of present ills but of future, unknown ones to come, then atheism is not enough.” This understanding of Christianity, while consistent with the current pope’s theology, is at odds with the spirit of Jesus. Plainly, Johnson is unable to conceive of a faith in a loving God that springs not out of a dread of death but out of a joyous sense of the beauty of life and love. “The great strength of Christianity,” Johnson writes, “has always been that it brings men and women to terms with death in a way which offers them comfort and an explanation.” He appears not to recognize that for more than a few men and women, the great strength of Christianity is that it brings them into more abundant life. It brings them to terms with death, too, but not in the way that Johnson means: instead of appealing to their self-concern by positing a *quid pro quo* afterlife that, conceived in terms of conventional Catholic piety, can be “believed” in by most educated people only through a colossal (and exhausting) act of self-deception, it challenges them to “die to self” and to embrace the reality of a mystical, eternal closeness to their Creator that, transcending space and time, resists selfish, sentimental, and superstitious conceptualization.

Johnson speculates about purgatory and hell in ways that may give many readers pause. How, he wonders, did God dispose, after their deaths, of the souls of such heretics as Voltaire, Tolstoy, Milton, and Shelley? What about Beethoven and Picasso, who set themselves up as virtual deities of art? Or Matisse, who once said “I am God”? Are these arrogant men burning in Hell? Or are they in purgatory, being prepared for Heaven? If so, precisely what form is their purgation taking? Johnson’s fixation on such questions, and the ease (even, it sometimes seems, the glee) with which he gives credence to the notion of a viciously punitive God, are unsettling. So is his attraction to the idea that God uses war and disease to draw people to Him. In Johnson’s view, the American Civil War was a divine instrument, as it resulted in the splitting of several Protestant denominations into Union and Confederate—a breakaway, he argues, that eventuated in robust, still-thriving Southern churches. (Johnson means, of course, *white* Southern churches; at no point in his discussion of religion in Dixie do black churches—or any

aspect of the black Southern experience—enter into his equation.) As he sees it, the robustness of these Southern churches is a wonderful thing. Never mind, apparently, that they broke away from their Northern counterparts in the first place over the slavery question (Johnson sanitizes this by referring instead to the Southern churches' support for "States' rights"), and never mind that they still tend to be lily-white bastions of racism and other prejudices (with some of which Johnson, here and elsewhere, has made clear his sympathy): for Johnson, the Bible Belt—land of Biblical literalism, black church fires, the Klan, and the Southern Baptist Convention (which voted recently to step up efforts to convert Jews)—is "the morally healthy core of America." It is clear that one reason why Johnson views the South in this way is that he sets less store by acts of Christian charity than by displays of piety, such as mealtime family prayers; another reason is that he is a social reactionary who, quite plainly, views God as a solid ally of the Holy Father, Lady Thatcher, and Pat Robertson.

Little surprise, then, that Johnson is snide about the "social gospel" (the idea that Christianity obliges us to seek social justice for our fellowman), that he considers Liberation Theology "plainly and simply an anti-Christian heresy, without any moral basis," and that he attacks as unchristian the black civil rights movement, "health politics," and environmentalism. Johnson tells us that during a recent conflict over nuclear testing between the French government and Greenpeace—whose activities he considers an example of "pagan fanaticism"—Johnson supported France, his rationale being that "building nuclear weapons" is "self-defence" and thus "endorsed by the law of God." (Nuclear energy itself, he elaborates, "is a gift of God, like other inventions. . . . To deny people the right to use it, on a pagan principle that the earth and oceans are sacrosanct, seems to me sinful.") Nor was this reader surprised to find Johnson writing about homosexuality in vicious and antiquated terms, as if the last two generations had seen no development in the understanding of sexual orientation. Patently, Johnson considers it a Catholic virtue to refuse to admit into his consciousness any truth about a subject that might challenge Church dogma about it. In some Christian traditions, such as that of Anglicanism, there has long been a recognition of the need to listen to other people's voices, to question one's assumptions, to allow for a possibility of increased understanding of the subject at hand, whatever it may be; for Johnson, though, the great Christian virtue is a refusal to allow anything (however persuasive) to challenge traditional views (however clearly they may be based on archaic ignorance or bias).

At work in gay rights and other movements, according to Johnson, is the abominable "moral relativism" that, he says, has made it possible for people in many churches nowadays to accept homosexuality, divorce, and premarital sex, even though these things violate the time-honored absolutes that have been defined by his Church and reaffirmed by his Pope. Yet Johnson himself turns out to be a moral relativist: he backs

capital punishment, which the Pope opposes. Apparently Johnson feels that it is acceptable for him to be a relativist in the direction of brutality and punitiveness, but unacceptable for others to be relativists (by his lights) in the direction of love, compassion, and understanding. (Yet that is, of course, precisely what Jesus was about: helping people to recognize that love transcended the law and that, in a Christian heart, tenderness toward others always trumps absolute dogma.) For all his hostility toward liberal Christians whom he accuses of compromising with “the world,” moreover, Johnson’s defense of religion is itself ultimately based on practical, real-world considerations: if we believe in God, he maintains, life has more meaning, people are more civilized, and the fear of death abates. “History suggests,” he says, “that the regular practice of a structured religion does impose restraints on human appetites, both individual and collective, which are difficult to achieve by any other means.” His pragmatism strongly resembles that of many American neoconservatives who staunchly defend traditional religion against “secular society” and “liberal” Christians, but who themselves lack any religious convictions whatsoever. Like those intellectuals, Johnson values highly structured religion as a means of preserving social order and as a brake on social change.

Early in *The Quest for God*, Johnson describes himself as having had “the best of religious educations,” and proceeds to catalog what sounds like a typical course of Catholic instruction (not exactly the same thing): a Sisters of Saint Dominic “infant school,” a Christian Brothers prep school, a Jesuit public school. One would wish that at some point during those formative years Johnson had been exposed not only to Aquinas and Augustine but also to the Koran and Dhammapada, as well as to Richard Hooker and other Anglican theologians; one would also hope that in more recent years Johnson had paid respectful attention to the works of this century’s most accomplished Catholic theologian, Hans Küng (who helped frame Vatican II, and whom Johnson’s beloved pontiff has since sought to silence), as well as to Paul Davies and other scientists who have written brilliantly about time, “complexity,” and chaos theory (which, in the late 1990s, arguably makes a far more intellectually credible and coherent case for God than traditional Catholic theology does). Perhaps the great task of the twenty-first century will be to raise up a generation of young people who are at once too serious and reflective to dismiss God out of hand and too brave and intelligent to fear critically examining the assumptions of the faiths they happen to have been born into—who realize that a living faith is not an airless, locked vault of doctrine but an incessant striving of the soul, a constant turning in the mind, a perennial reconciliation of ancient wisdom with new insights.

TESS LEWIS

The Heroes We Deserve

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one;
Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—
We all have seen him in the pantomime,
Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

—Lord Byron, *Don Juan*

BY THE VICTORIAN AGE, *hubris* and *ananke* alone were not enough to humanize the age's heroes. Tabloids had long been scandalmongering, but Lytton Strachey was the first to give muckraking biographies a highbrow gloss. From the vantage point of his artistic stature, Strachey used rumor, conjecture, and insinuation to expose the personal vices and private failings of his "eminent Victorians." Today, the indulgence in scandal and speculation to the neglect of the subject's real accomplishments has become so pervasive that it has acquired its own label: pathography. It was not long before historians, too, were infected by the revisionist virus. In *The Outline of History* (1920), H. G. Wells was one of the first to attempt programmatically to cut the great figures of the past down to size. Once he had finished with them, he claimed, Hegelian heroes, such as Napoleon, would properly be seen as little more than "cockere[ls] on [the] dungheap" of history. Only mythical heroes appear immune to the ravages of pathographers and the 'new historians'. More malleable than their real-life counterparts, these legendary figures can conveniently be recast to serve the needs of the age.

The cultural importance of the four heroes in Ian Watt's *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* may have diminished somewhat in the recent past, but their appeal seems to have persisted over the centuries not only despite their very evident clay feet, but even because of them.¹ Faust's diabolical thirst for knowledge and experience, Don Quixote's mad idealism, Don Juan's predatory sensuality and pride, Robinson Crusoe's almost anti-social self-reliance all reflect particular conflicts that arose as the communal, social, and political systems of the Middle Ages ceded to the predominantly individualistic systems of the Modern Era. Watt traces these four myths

¹ MYTHS OF MODERN INDIVIDUALISM: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe, by Ian Watt. Cambridge University Press. \$27.95.

back to their origins and charts the radical change in the way these heroes were perceived as the oppressive ideological forces of the Counter Reformation gave way to the Romantics' idealization of the individual man. Watt sees these four heroes as more than just fictional creations that have struck the chords of various ages. They may in fact be as significant as historical figures. Watt's working definition of *myth* makes this clear, describing a myth as "a traditional story that is exceptionally widely known throughout the culture, that is credited with historical or quasi-historical belief, and that embodies or symbolizes some of the most basic values of a society."

The common and most evident value of modern Western society that Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Robinson Crusoe represent is the importance of the individual. The overwhelming egoism of these four characters is severely punished in the early versions of their stories. Faust and Don Juan suffer eternal damnation. Don Quixote is mocked and imprisoned. Robinson Crusoe's isolation is presented as punishment for having disobeyed his father. Yet, following the aftermath of the French Revolution, as the forces of individualism were perceived as less of a threat to the social order—or even, as with Romantic artists, were elevated to a virtual cult—the severity of these heroes' fates was greatly mitigated.

In this study Watt performs the difficult feat of weaving together the historical developments of two multivalent abstract concepts, 'myth' and 'individualism', with four concrete but mutable literary entities. *Myths of Modern Individualism* is an excellent study in narrow and exact literary history, but Watt's inadequate presentation of individualism limits his range. Individualism is a contested concept among contemporary social and political philosophers; its meaning hinges on context and tradition. Utilitarians, for example, depart from the 'social contract' tradition of Hobbes and Locke and take an 'atomist' view of individualism, seeing society as a group of individuals pursuing their own ends. The philosopher of science Karl Popper and the sociologist Émile Durkheim consider individualism a methodological approach to historical patterns or societies, which they understand primarily in terms of the individuals that comprise them. Most recently, many analytical philosophers have come to view individualism through the lens of the rights and liberties that they claim should be accorded each person. Watt's history of individualism is general enough to be unobjectionable, but his use of the term is so broad as to mean little more than the general rise of the individual's prominence in social and political realms since the Renaissance. So, while Watt amply demonstrates the effects social forces have had on specific cultural myths, he does little to deepen our understanding of the forces themselves.

In contrast to his treatment of individualism, Watt's analyses of the development of the Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Robinson Crusoe myths are detailed and compelling. The histories of these myths

are fascinating in their own right, and even brief summaries reveal the extent to which their stories have been influenced by historical currents.

The Faust myth is based on an actual figure, about whom little reliable information has survived. George Faust or Faustus was a widely known wandering magician born in Germany around 1480. He died not far from Freiburg approximately sixty years later. Claiming to be “the chief of necromancers, astrologer, the second magus, palmist, diviner,” Faust made his living conjuring the dead, fortunetelling, and performing black magic. Despite his sometimes obvious charlatanism, Faust had a great deal of courage to work openly in magic during the Reformation, when witch-hunting was a sporadic, but very real danger. In Faust’s lifetime, several prominent theologians, including Martin Luther, accused him of being in league with the devil. Yet, the most influential version of his satanic dealings was established by the *Faustbuch* in 1587. The full title of this anonymous work reads: *The History of Doctor Johann Faustus the notorious magician and necromancer, how he sold himself to the Devil for an appointed time, what strange adventures he saw meanwhile, bringing some about and living through others, until at last he received his well-deserved wages. For the greater part collected and prepared for the printer out of his own posthumous writings as a horrible precedent, abominable example and sincere warning to all conceited, inquisitive and godless persons.* The *Faustbuch* was immensely popular and widely translated, but it took Christopher Marlowe’s 1616 tragedy to transform the Faust legend from a gruesome cautionary tale to a resonant myth.

Marlowe’s Faustus willingly forfeits his soul for forbidden knowledge in the firm belief that magic and knowledge will bring omnipotence. But well before the contracted twenty-four years of Mephistopheles’ servitude are up, Faustus realizes that he will not escape the eternal damnation he had thought a “mere old wives’ tale.” Marlowe himself was repeatedly charged with heresy, and his heretical pronouncements may well have brought about his death at the hands of suspected government agents. In his play, however, he does not challenge the reigning orthodoxy of hell: no amount of repentance can save Faustus’ soul as he is carried off into a gaping hell-mouth.

Goethe’s Faust is redeemed despite the fact that he feels little remorse for having caused the deaths, directly and indirectly, of Gretchen, their child, Gretchen’s mother, and her brother. In the early nineteenth century, when the doctrine of eternal damnation had lost its hold on the European imagination and self-assertion began to be admired, Faust’s wager of his soul for knowledge and experience became subject to mitigating circumstances. Faust’s enterprising activities and Eternal Womanhood in the form of Gretchen’s penitent voice pleading for his soul win the Lord’s leniency. Watt notes

The earlier Faust tradition stood for the idea of the Fall having occurred because man yielded to the temptation to eat of the fruit of forbidden knowledge of good and evil; but in Goethe *all* the fruit on

that tree has become good, if rather tasteless; all a man needs is the energy to pluck the fruit, and a powerful digestion.

The *ewig-Weibliche* proves Don Quixote's undoing rather than his redemption. He pays for his obsessive pursuit of Dulcinea and chivalric ideals with a few sound beatings and a great deal of ridicule. Like Marlowe, Cervantes was a man both of and against his time. Cervantes was temporarily excommunicated for mistakes he made while working in a government commissary. Reinstated in the Catholic Church, Cervantes perhaps felt the need to temper his hero's defiance of social and religious norms as he finished the novel's second part shortly before his death in 1616. Don Quixote's sanity is restored and the narrator, unreliable as he may be, condemns the chivalric romances that led astray the self-proclaimed knight errant.

There were many reworkings of the Quixote story, but the most relevant to Watt's thesis is Dostoevsky's elevation of the Quixote figure to a Christ-like naïf in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky's debt to Cervantes is clear and acknowledged. Prince Myshkin is as serenely oblivious as Quixote of the conflicts between reality and his ideals, but he ultimately descends into utter insanity. Dostoevsky intended Myshkin to be as ridiculous a figure as Quixote, but the serious nature of the Prince's ideals and Dostoevsky's own ideological fervor prevent him from achieving Quixote's universal appeal.

Like Don Quixote, Don Juan is a product of seventeenth-century Spain. *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and His Guest of Stone*) was first published in 1630, but was certainly performed earlier. It is attributed to the Spanish monk Fray Gabriel Téllez who wrote under the pen name Tirso de Molina. In this play, Don Juan Tenorio heartlessly seduces four women, one of whom, Doña Ana, is his friend's fiancée. He also kills Doña Ana's father, then mocks his grave. When the statue of the murdered man comes to claim him, Don Juan realizes that he is facing eternal damnation and quickly calls for a confessor. It is, however, too late and the statue drags him down to hell.

Molière lessens Don Juan's crimes in the 1665 play *Don Juan; or the Feast of Stone*. Preferring to spend his energy defying social conventions and religious beliefs, Don Juan seduces only one woman. The stone statue seals Don Juan's fate with the moral, "the wages of sin is death." Lord Byron uses the Don Juan story as an opportunity for his own virtuosic satires of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other Romantic poets as well as to create a variation on the myth. Nonetheless, he presents Don Juan as a charming but passive youth seduced by aggressive women.

Robinson Crusoe was created in 1719, almost a century later than Faust, Don Quixote, and Don Juan. This chronological gap proves crucial in the tenor of the Crusoe myth: it is an only slightly qualified celebration of an individualistic hero. Crusoe's shipwreck is presented as a consequence of disobeying his father's orders to remain in England and work to maintain his position in the "upper station of low life." Crusoe insists on seeking adventure and is duly punished. After twenty-

eight years of industrious isolation, Crusoe returns to civilization, marries and becomes a rich man. Although Daniel Defoe wrote two sequels to the first novel, they are not particularly relevant to the lineaments of Crusoe as a mythical figure. In fact, Rousseau and Marx, who were most influential in reshaping the Crusoe myth, used only Crusoe's experiences on the island for their ends, disregarding the religious and punitive elements in the novel. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau presented Crusoe as the paragon of natural education, free of the falsity caused by social values and conventions. Marx was similarly selective and used Crusoe's domestication and cultivation of the island as an illustration for his labor theory of value.

There have been many imitations and versions of the Robinson Crusoe story—*The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812–27), Muriel Spark's *Robinson* (1958), J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), etc.—but the most elaborate is Michel Tournier's *Friday* (1967). In Tournier's version, Crusoe comes to realize, as he Europeanizes his man Friday, that his civilization is unbearably heartless, calculating, and complacent. When the opportunity to return to Europe finally comes, Crusoe stays, but Friday, intrigued by technology in the form of the ship's rigging, sails away to a life of certain servitude. Individuality can only be maintained against society, not within it.

My summaries do not do justice to Watt's sensitive and subtle treatment of the evolution of these four myths. Nonetheless, there are a number of aspects of their evolution that would have enriched Watt's account of the interaction between these myths and the forces of individualism. There is, for example, the fact that although the term "individualism" did not gain currency until the nineteenth century, the later versions of these four myths often anticipated the term's different shadings in different European countries. In France, individualism has primarily had the negative connotations of social disorder and anarchy. Molière's Don Juan is punished less for his sins than for his brazen flouting of social conventions. Rousseau's co-option of a truncated *Robinson Crusoe* as the embodiment of the natural man, recreating an unspoiled civilization in isolation, reveals an ambivalent but undeniable emphasis on social order.

Defoe's Crusoe himself nicely anticipates the English tendency to use individualism to signify nonconformity in religion and the admirable qualities of self-reliance. Crusoe is nothing if not self-reliant, and his religious beliefs, though intermittent, bear the mark of the Puritans' prizing of individual responsibility over social obligation. Byron's Don Juan has little time for religion, using all his self-reliance to cope with an onslaught of ravishing women.

While Byron himself epitomized the Romantic hero, Goethe's Faust perfectly embodies the German understanding of individualism, with its emphasis on the Romantic ideals of individuality, originality, and self-realization, and the cult of individual genius. German thinkers later applied this Romantic view of identity to a theory of the nation or state as an organic community of individuals. Faust's ruthless pursuit of

desires he both feels and wishes to feel culminates in his final devotion to the *Volk* as he develops for them the vast tract of land he has received from the emperor.

In his coda, "Thoughts on the Twentieth Century," Watt attributes the waning of these mythic individuals' importance to our cultural imagination primarily to the rise of the entertainment industry and a decrease in cultural literacy. While he acknowledges "innumerable" other reasons, these are certainly the most obvious. One more directly related to his thesis can be found in a passage from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to which Watt himself refers. In the chapter "Of Individualism in Democracies," Tocqueville presciently noted the irreconcilable tensions between the individual and the community inherent in democracies. He compared American individualism favorably to the egoism of aristocratic countries, but warned that if not held in check by democratic institutions and by the sense of responsibility that accompanies free politics, individualism ultimately becomes atomistic isolation.

Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.

In our age of militant multiculturalism and identity politics, this "greater society" is disintegrating into smaller exclusive societies based on sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or some combination thereof. Our collective imagination is being blinkered by reductive labels and individuals are often subsumed by one or two aspects of their identities.

This regression into a medievalism in which the individual is once again a functionary of the communal consciousness is not new. Nazism and Communism fed on the sense of isolation engendered in individualistic societies, seducing their acolytes with promises of ideal communities if they would only submit to a particular collective. Both systems were ruthless in their attempts to erase all traces of their countries' traditional cultures and to substitute faceless idealizations of the *Herrenvolk* or the proletariat for historical and cultural heroes. The only individuals officially celebrated were the "Great Leaders," and the patent falsity of the mandatory cults simply underscored the sense of threat these regimes had associated with individualism.

The multicultural fragmentation prevalent today is yet another response to the same sense of isolation, and it reveals that the forces of individualism have once again become threatening. Not only are Watt's "heroes of modern individualism" losing their influence, but the concept of hero itself is being discredited. Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Robinson Crusoe may eventually emerge from our modern medievalism with their former appeal restored. Perhaps then they will serve as the social calibrators Watt intended.

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

On the Art of Liberty

IT HADN'T OCCURRED TO ME that liberty was an art, that it was "like making music." It lives, in Robert Grudin's new book,¹ "in the freedom *between* ideas, rather than in subjection to them," and its method (for neither art nor freedom is without method) is dialogue. Dialogue between past and present; between communities; between individual and community. Dialogue between freedom and security, nature and technology, form and content, theory and practice, city and country; between logic and emotion, absolute and relative, between Plato's One and his Many. Such are the parameters of "the healthy mind" that knows that "fixed positions or interpretations can only be appreciated in terms of their opposites or alternatives." Thesis, antithesis, synthesis? Reconciliation of opposites is not the goal. Those trained in the art of liberty (an art which must be "taught to the young, bequeathed down generations") are as willing to shift between opposites as they are to harmonize them, perhaps more willing. Rather than recoiling from contradictions and ambiguities, they are energized by them, recognizing in them not only the constants of human experience, but essential conditions of creative thought. They know that systems, particularly fully coherent systems, fulfill "the natural human desire for certainty and security." But for them that desire is "the root of ideology and dogma," of "versions of truth" that enslave rather than set free.

"The dialogic mind" is thus inherently democratic, both in its political commitment and in its way of thinking. It welcomes the unexpected; what it seeks, in its give and take with other minds, is "strangeness," "the shock of new information," of "divergent opinion, unpredictable data, sudden emotion." Creativity, for Grudin, comes out of something he does not hesitate to call "chaos," "the abundance and turbulence of live thinking."

Yet our society does not set a high value on chaos, or even turbulence. It "prizes words like . . . 'consistent,' 'coherent,' and 'integrity,'" it devalues "uncertainty or anxiety or pure confusion about the complexity of things." And that's natural, even necessary. We must live our lives linearly, from bed to breakfast to work and eventually to bed again, a "unitary journey through life." We are taught to think linearly too. Yet "we are actually in the midst of another life, multidimensional and oceanically rich," however obscured by our daily trajectory and the

¹ ON DIALOGUE, by Robert Grudin. Houghton Mifflin. \$23.95.

"linear, yea-or-nay thinking" imposed upon us. Liberty inheres in our "ability to bring to awareness" as many of those dimensions as possible, in an "open, generous, forgiving, unpunctuated" dialogue of ideas.

How to achieve this? Listen. Talk. Read. Read Erasmus—he taught the art of *copia*, of abundance in writing; he practiced it in *The Praise of Folly*. Read Rabelais. Read Montaigne. Read Shakespeare. Read the multidimensional language of *copia*, "the eloquence of our forebears, as preserved in great literature." Read for the overturning of assumptions, for surprise. "The best minds are always courting surprise, putting themselves into positions where the very texture of their reality will dissolve and reform anew." Don't expect answers: read "not for the resolution of life's issues but rather as a means of understanding what the issues are and of facing them as free people."

Evidently, this is strong stuff. To "loose the hold of mental bullies like consistency, certainty, and coherence" is not a project that will command universal agreement. *But*—there is always a but in dialogue as Grudin practices it, since dialogue is both external and internal, with others and with the self. So as Grudin argues with himself, he fills his book with buts and yet's, with the continuing qualifications of interior dialogue.

Again and again a statement will invite disagreement. My WASP hackles rise as Grudin, recommending "a rhetoric of honesty," defines that familiar virtue as "less an urge to tell the truth . . . than *a disposition and urge to tell all* [his emphasis]—to express and share without stint or pretense or omission the full sweep of one's experience and feeling." All? I wasn't brought up to regard the therapy world as a model. *Don't* let it all hang out. Let sleeping dogs lie.

Wait, however; the qualification is on its way. "Copia," indeed, "would seem to constitute the rhetoric of honesty." "But *copia* is not the rhetoric of everyday life. Everyday interactions . . . [do not] allow for a direct expression of how we happen to be feeling at the moment; this might be shocking and hurtful." The domain of dialogue is exactly the domain of yet's and but's; by the time we reach Grudin's balancing discussion of Plato's One and Many, of wholeness and fragmentation, we have been prepared, page by page, to recognize these little words as Grudin's fundamental vocabulary of dialogic liberty.

This is a very short book—228 pages, with lots of white space. They include eight pages of bibliography and an index that stretches through 224 names from Aquinas, Archimedes, Arcimboldo, Arendt, and Aristotle to Zajonc. Grudin is in dialogue with many voices. Yet this is not a scholarly book. It isn't meant to be; Grudin wants to share as widely as possible the results of his external and internal dialogues, in the faith that there are common readers out there listening, ready, if encouraged, to speak up on their own, even, perhaps, to talk back. Naturally he cannot give a thorough exposition of any of the highly abstract ideas with which it deals. Grudin calls his book an essay *in*, not on, free thought; elsewhere he refers to "these meditations." He gives pride of

place to Renaissance authors (“copia is a characteristically Renaissance event”), and for him “essay” still means what it meant to Montaigne, who invented the *essai*: a trying out of ideas, outside the mind and within it. Montaigne, however, is Grudin’s instance, not his model. Grudin gives a couple of his own journal entries early on, but he’s much more interested in general ideas than in personal exploration. He hasn’t much space for copia, for the amassing of specificities. “Nothing,” he remarks, “is so effective an alarm, or so potent a tonic, as the conscious taste of one’s own vulgarity.” I could profit from some examples—copious examples—of that. Among his “Notes on Diversity,” none is longer than a paragraph, and one is complete in three mischievous words: “Diversity is sexy.” Though he’ll return to the idea in three pages of “Meditations on Dialogue and Sexuality,” they are hardly less general. It’s up to the dialogic reader to supply the examples—or, conceivably, the counterexamples.

If we’re trying to place *On Dialogue*, it’s best thought of as a kind of wisdom literature. Ecclesiastes covers a lot, but it doesn’t go into anything very thoroughly. Neither do Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell.” Neither does *Walden*. Ecclesiastes, however, though he was a preacher, was not an academic. Neither was Montaigne. Nor were Blake or Thoreau. Grudin is, and it isn’t easy for an academic to put his training by. Academics are not trained, nor are they likely to train their students, to meditate. What they—what we—inculcate is exactly the elimination of meditative drift. Go easy on the copia. Omit needless words. Don’t ramble. Your essay won’t be judged as an *essai*, but as a linear argument.

As Grudin well knows, those injunctions are strongly functional; when you’re trying to put across a point, establish a thesis, linear writing is the way to go. And Grudin has a thesis, as should be clear by now. It’s a thesis he no doubt arrived at by the process he’s recommending, in which the open mind, “unconstrained by monolithic canons, playful, reflective and capable of limitless variety,” aware of its own “inner multiplicity,” “momentarily surrenders its pretension to coherence in an effort to understand and refine its responses.” But that “momentarily” carries weight. Paradoxically—or better, dialogically—Grudin is no foe of academic rigor, and his writing is a model of effective linear exposition. “At the start of this chapter I gave examples of three forms of diversity . . . I went on to discuss . . . two . . . extensions of the idea . . .” Or: Foucault, in his “discussion of the sixteenth-century philosopher-scientist Paracelsus,” “is applying four theoretical strategies. First . . . Second . . . Third. . . In four ways, then . . .” Frequent headings, summaries, and an unusually full table of contents map our way through the book.

Readers will appreciate the advantages of these characteristically academic guideposts, even as they note them as examples of the ease with paradox and contradiction of Grudin’s healthy mind. They may also note an equally characteristic disadvantage of academic writing. Especially in the opening pages, before we see what Grudin is up to, the

prose may seem what students call “dry.” But press on; it gains energy, and even elegance, as the academic advantages begin to kick in. If it’s less meditative—and copious—than it might be, it’s informed, concise, and trustworthy. Take his dissection of Foucault, for instance, tellingly placed in the chapter on “Free Thought and Authority.” Foucault is Grudin’s chosen example of “Authority in Language,” of how writers can “usurp authority over their readers,” and how readily readers can be lured to “capitulate to textual authority, no matter how fallaciously it is asserted.” As a Renaissance scholar, Grudin has studied Paracelsus, as most Foucault groupies have not. We can believe him when he tells us that Foucault’s rhetorical strategies are crafted, not to increase a reader’s understanding, but to “empower himself over the reader,” ignoring contrary evidence, simplifying historical complexities, cannily misattributing quotations, “pull[ing]” the reader “into his verbal net.” “To what extent is Foucault merely careless, and to what extent is he alert and manipulative?” Asking the question, Grudin is pretty sure of the answer, and though he takes his single example from *The Order of Things*, anyone who wants more copia can check the opening of *Madness and Civilization*, where Foucault, without ever quite saying so, manages to make a reader believe that Renaissance cities were in the habit of getting rid of their insane by packing them into boats and sending them out to sea. Trapped in what Grudin calls “the provinciality of the present,” few of us are in a position to demur.

It is the business—part of the business—of higher education to liberate us from the provinciality of the present. “To the same extent that we must hold conversation with the diversity of present cultures, we must open a dialogue with the past,” with the *temporal* diversity that “holds not only our own varieties of culture and experience but countless others in untold richness.” We may, of course, talk with those of “the past’s survivors” who are still among us; the testimony even of our grandparents is likely to reveal “profoundly different times and concerns.” But the limits of such direct dialogue are obvious. So “we must negotiate with [the past’s] silent ambassadors: relics, architecture, literature, art,” not with the awed nostalgia that obscures their true complexity, but with informed respect for what they have to tell.

Grudin has spent most of his life in higher education, and it bulks large among his concerns. “Purposelessness in higher education, and the relative rarity of philosophy in the public forum are . . . symptomatic of a society whose discourse is distorted down narrow professional channels rather than allowed free scope.” There follows a listing of “major questions” that “go largely unaddressed”: “love, liberty, death and the function of higher education.” The common reader might think that listing a shade bizarre, but I’m an academic too, and I decided not to giggle. Education is important, and Grudin is worth listening to. Though he weighs in on the culture wars, as we might expect (what’s right and wrong with Allan Bloom), he saves his heaviest artillery for the rigidities of the university. In the university, if anywhere, we should

encounter productive dialogue. Alas! "Touted as cradles of free thought, fairness and open expression, American universities of the late twentieth century are in fact relatively boring places where expression is systemically limited and unfairness is all but routine." Universities are fragmented communities, compartmentalized and departmentalized, populated by professors so specialized that they "often have difficulty in understanding the values and needs," let alone the intellectual issues, confronted by those in other disciplines. Academic publications are "rife with ideological frenzy, private ambition and the dynamics of quid pro quo," their language "often so rarefied and jargonized as to be barbaric." What is needed is a restructuring friendly to dialogue, and to real, not apparent, diversity.

Grudin's prescriptions for a liberal and liberating education are surprising enough to quote at length. Certainly higher education should "address the common experiences of adults and . . . prepare our students for active life." That's why we require courses in the humanities, social sciences, and natural science, and think we've done our best. What's missing? It's not what we expect to hear, not Montaigne and Shakespeare, not the canon, however defined or redefined.

Engineering and technology have in large measure created modern history. They have done so, moreover, within a shaping dialogue of commerce, fueled by universal desires for security and profit and buttressed and limited by law. This world of technology and commerce and law—which for short we can call material culture—is routinely derided by intellectuals as mundane and boring; yet viewed distinctly, it is vivid and fascinating, not least because it is the world on which everybody, intellectuals included, depends for survival.

It is crucial to study and understand that world, "not only in order to interact with it but also in order to preserve our independence from it." "Real freedom is available only through a knowledge of the marketplace," with the machines it shapes and that shape our lives. But "most American college graduates are about as analytically aware of engineering, commerce and law as they were when they graduated from the womb." So what Grudin means when he calls for dialogue between departments, for interdisciplinary education, isn't just a sprinkle of collaborative electives given by like-minded professors. This man is serious. "Administratively, universities should reintegrate schools of business, engineering, law and other professional schools with their colleges of arts and sciences"; dialogue should begin between these "long-alienated disciplines." "Introductory courses in engineering, business and law" should be essential—that is, required—parts of undergraduate education, even at the sacrifice of some electives. Humanistically designed, they would be no mere technical introductions, but "historical and comprehensive, weaving the subject at hand into the fabric of culture," and focusing not only on the "principles and benefits

of disciplines," but on their "limitations, excesses and dangers." Because if we do not understand the powerful voices around us, "our freedom . . . is an illusion."

A regretful addendum: In the age of the Spelchek, I'm getting used to foolish errors in books from reputable publishers. But "nuclear power in the 1930's"? "Preferred" for "proffered"? "Banglador" for "Bangalore"? And the rest of the sentence, which praises the software produced by "native engineers, who perhaps had not heard of a computer ten years ago"! My recommendation for editor and author: a course in modern India—or a trip to Bangalore, where native engineers would willingly enter into dialogue.

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GARY KRIST

Schemers and Schemas

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE WORKING CLASSES were an endlessly fertile subject for writers in this country. Honorable lives played out in dreary, poverty-straitened circumstances seemed to contain enough color and passion to fill any number of novels, short stories, and plays. Writers like John Steinbeck, Henry Roth, John Dos Passos, and Clifford Odets even based a movement on this conviction—the “proletarian literature” movement—characterized by an earnest belief in the dramatic potential of the common man. Nowadays, though, we seem a little more cynical about the possibility of tragic dimensions among the working poor. Jane Smiley aside, we don’t have too many grass- or oil-stained Lears in current fiction (I note this with a certain amount of relief). American writers today seem far more interested in the rich, and when they do turn their attentions to the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, they tend to focus either on the quieter, smaller-souled tribulations of normal Joes and Janes or else on the sensationalistic doings of drug addicts, crooks, serial killers, and other extreme types.

The situation has always seemed different in Britain, where novelists have shown a more consistent preoccupation with unglamorous but self-respecting lives. Pat Barker (particularly in her early books) and many others have taken up the argument advanced by Thomas Hardy a hundred years ago—namely, that full-sized emotions can thrive in the most unheroic of settings. And now, with the publication of *Last Orders*, Graham Swift does his part to extend that argument, focusing on the class of tradesmen and shopkeepers.¹ This remarkable novel, the author’s sixth, traces the daylong journey of a group of male friends to dispose of their dead companion’s ashes. In the process, it evokes a full range of hopes, jealousies, resentments, disappointments, and yes, tragic passions, all within the scope of a half-dozen severely circumscribed lives.

The book is structured loosely but cleverly. The skeleton of the story consists of a series of present-tense chapters recounting the day’s drive from Bermondsey in the London suburbs to the seaside at Margate, where Jack Dodds, a butcher from a family of butchers, has asked that his ashes be scattered. Four men from the neighborhood have agreed to fulfill this last wish—Ray, Lenny, Vic, and Vince—and each one contributes to the evolving picture with reflective first-person monologues of

¹ LAST ORDERS, by *Graham Swift*. Alfred A. Knopf. \$23.00.

his own, interwoven into the current action. This mosaic-technique, while certainly not unique in contemporary fiction, is unusually effective here, mainly because Swift is able to distinguish each perspective from the rest with an amazing subtlety of voice and perception. And while the transitions of thought and memory, like the detours in the physical journey, occasionally seem a little forced and self-conscious—motivated more by the will of the author than by the natural development of the story—the richness of the voices carries us through:

It ain't like your regular sort of day.

Bernie pulls me a pint and puts it in front of me. He looks at me, puzzled, with his loose, doggy face but he can tell I don't want no chit-chat. That's why I'm here, five minutes after opening, for a little silent pow-wow with a pint glass. He can see the black tie, though it's four days since the funeral.

The story unfolds indirectly, by the accretion of this kind of casually-conveyed detail. As the four men proceed from London to Rochester, to Chatham, to Canterbury (a significant way station, given the resemblance of this book to a latter-day *Canterbury Tales*), they gradually reveal more and more about how their lives intersected, for better or worse. Each stop on the journey becomes a station of the cross, accompanied by ritualized bouts of contemplation from each character. And by the time this carload of mourners reaches the Pier in Margate, they've summoned up a surprisingly profound and textured world—a world limited in variety of experience, maybe, but not in variety of emotion. Like the old proletarian novelists, Swift elevates some humble doings to a high emotional plane. He turns the story of “four blokes on a special delivery” into something as moving and grand in scale as a classical tragedy.

In his fifth novel, *The Last of the Savages*, Jay McInerney also reaches for tragic scale, though he's a lot less successful in the attempt than Swift is.² This highly schematic book tells the story of a friendship between two tidily-contrasted young men. As the action begins, Patrick Keane, the narrator, is a scholarship boy at a tony New England prep school. As deeply conventional as he is socially insecure, Patrick is eager to forget his common mill-town upbringing and launch himself into a preppie world of lacrosse tournaments, loose-moraled debutantes, and summer vacations at the family estates of his better-heeled classmates. He quickly falls under the spell of his roommate, Will Savage, who—though the scion of an old Southern family—has nonetheless rejected the very upper-class trappings that Patrick aches for. Having grown up in privilege, Will directs his romantic yearnings down the social register rather than up. He's obsessed by blues culture, and wants to spend his life discovering and promoting black Southern singers and musicians.

² THE LAST OF THE SAVAGES, by Jay McInerney. Alfred A. Knopf. \$24.00.

The book follows these two boys—one a self-styled rebel, the other an admitted “slave to convention”—as their friendship develops over decades. Patrick maintains his even keel, sailing straight from prep school to Yale to Harvard Law to a partnership in a New York law firm; Will, meanwhile, bounces more dramatically from triumph to disaster, getting into trouble with the law, alienating his family, and doing a pretty good imitation of a counterculture prince, with enough money behind him to keep a whole entourage in drugs, extravagant living quarters, and redneck weaponry. Meanwhile, the opposing characteristics of the two young men continue to divide neatly into McNerney’s grand schema, with concepts like *danger*, *vision*, *wildness*, *freedom*, and *defiance* falling under the Will category, and *safety*, *expedience*, *steadiness*, *bondage*, and *obedience* lining up under the Patrick column. It begins to seem like writing-by-the-numbers.

Compounding this overarching problem of artificiality is the fact that everything in the book has a slightly generic quality. The story seems to draw less from real life than from other fiction—*The Great Gatsby*, *A Separate Peace*, the stories of Richard Yates. Every element in it carries the scent of a literary source, from the classic Tennessee Williams-style Savage family (two sons tragically killed, an ethereal, distant mother, etc.) to the prep school episode in which one roommate takes the rap for his weaker friend’s violation of dorm rules (reminiscent of an early Tobias Wolff story). Even Patrick’s sudden epiphanies seem borrowed:

I was tired of being alone again on New Year’s Eve, that most melancholy of holidays. I had a terrible premonition of a solitary life, of dinners on TV trays and odd-smelling, transient rooms. Something was wrong with me; I was afflicted with a terrible self-consciousness which seemed to set me apart, doomed forever to be a spectator at the ball, watching the dancers from the sidelines.

Despite all this secondhand prose, however, I have to admit that *The Last of the Savages* is a surprisingly enjoyable read. Though Patrick’s voice is often too stilted for comfort, his observations are always cleverly and deftly expressed. And one has to respect the fact that this narrator makes no attempt to deceive himself about his naked academic and social aspirations (during the campus unrest after Kent State, Patrick’s main concern is that grading modifications at Yale might affect his applications to law school). He’s ruthlessly honest with himself about most things—I won’t reveal the one exception—and is eventually clear-sighted enough to recognize that his friendship with Will is his only saving grace, “the single daring and unpredictable choice I allowed myself along the way.” This final realization, moreover, makes for a fairly effective ending, even with the appearance on the last page of some overreaching water imagery lifted from *The Great Gatsby*’s “boats against the current” conclusion. Although *Savages* is a disappointment after

McInerney's very strong fourth novel, *Brightness Falls*, it's the work of a writer who at least has read a lot of great books.

We're presented with more overly-schematic plotting in Steven Millhauser's *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer*.³ In this atmospheric novel, Millhauser puts his own idiosyncratic spin on a classic Horatio Alger story, filling the outlines of a rags-to-riches potboiler with a parable about the steep price of imagination. The book tracks the rising fortunes of its title character, a bright young lad in the 1890s who advances from hotel bellboy to cigar stand proprietor, restaurateur, hotelier, and finally real estate developer of a very special kind. Even as a teenager, Martin is a boy with plans: "[H]is passion was for working things out, bring things together, arranging the unarrangeable, making combinations." He possesses that distinctly American mixture of grand vision and entrepreneurial energy, along with a permanent sense of dissatisfaction that pushes him on to greater and greater feats of capitalistic fervor. As each of Martin's dreams becomes a reality, a new and wilder dream is born, which he proceeds to pursue with a single-mindedness that borders on megalomania.

Anyone familiar with Millhauser's recent work can guess what form these dreams take. As in his story collection *The Barnum Museum*, Millhauser is obsessed here with elaborate, fantasylike structures—independent clockwork worlds furnished with elaborate museumlike displays, all of which can be described, at great length, in exact, fussily-detailed prose. For instance, we hear much about the attractions in one of Martin's early hotels:

Thus there was a circular theater in which a panorama of the entire Manhattan shoreline continually unwound; a room containing a wigwam, a wax squaw gathering sticks, a young brave hacking a rock with a sharpened stone tool, and a seated chief smoking a long pipe, set against a painted background depicting a riverbank; and a hall called the Pageant of Industry and Invention, which contained working scale models of an Otis elevator, a steam train on an Elevated track, a Broadway cable car. . . .

And so on and so on. These buildings—"environments" might be a better word—are clearly intended by Millhauser as metaphors, and as Martin conceives of and subsequently builds his ever more elaborate "fever-dreams of stone," he surrenders himself more completely to the dream-world of imagination they represent, distancing himself from the real world around him. Each new successful restaurant, hotel, or residence gives him the impetus (and capital) he needs to dream deeper, bigger, more outlandish dreams. Finally, he risks everything to build his

³ MARTIN DRESSLER: *The Tale of an American Dreamer*, by Steven Millhauser. Crown Publishers. \$24.00.

magnum opus—the Grand Cosmo. More than a place *in* the city, the Cosmo is a replacement *for* the city, complete with artificial parks and ponds and gardens, a proto-Disney World where one could live for months without venturing out into the world of sunshine and air. In fact, that is exactly what Martin does. He moves into the Grand Cosmo and, like an artist unhealthily possessed by his vision, doesn't come out for a very long time.

Paralleling the trajectory of Martin's professional achievements is that of his erotic conquests. Here, too, the dichotomy of dream and reality is deeply rooted. In his relationships with the opposite sex, Martin finds himself attracted alternately to the earthy and the ethereal: a matronly hotel guest many years his senior, a ghostly ten-year-old girl, a broad and buxom chambermaid, and finally, the pair of sisters from whom he must choose a wife. Caroline is the dream-sister: remote, distracted, cold, and otherworldly; Emmeline is practical, smart, witty, and warm. Martin chooses the dream-sister as a wife (no surprise here), and lives to regret it. The marriage proves to be a failure, as does the Grand Cosmo, leaving Martin stranded with the rest of us on the prosaic shores of ordinary life.

Ultimately, then, the book can be read as a meditation on the ravages of uncompromising vision, and as such it's a fairly revealing portrait of the artist. Millhauser, too, has his odd and impractical vision that he's been realizing in book after book. But in this novel, as in his recent short stories, I find that vision disconcertingly limited. Millhauser's dream-world, like Martin's, is closed, claustrophobic, and artificial—a diorama of life rather than the thing itself. So while *Martin Dressler* may be an interesting novel, it's never a powerful one.

After the slightly pretentious tone of both the McNerney and the Millhauser books, it was a relief to pick up Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land*.⁴ This second novel has few high and noble aspirations; it's just a good old coming-of-age story, distinguished by the fact that it's a Chinese-American girl who's coming of age. And although the protagonist's ethnicity doesn't lend it all that much novelty in these days of Asian literary renaissance, it does give Jen some interesting specifics to work with, especially since Mona Chang, the Chinese-American in question, converts to Judaism halfway through the book. "Changowitz" is the name she wants to be known by, and it's a measure of the novel's loopiness that some people actually oblige her in this.

Mona is a first-generation kid, the daughter of Chinese-born parents who naturally approach life with very different attitudes than she does. To the extent that this book is about anything serious, it is about this generational clash. Mona's parents have worked hard in their adopted country to achieve a certain lifestyle—a nice house in the mostly Jewish Westchester suburb of Scarsill (read Scarsdale, wink, wink)—which Mona takes for granted. Whereas the goal of Mr. and Mrs. Chang is to

⁴ MONA IN THE PROMISED LAND, by Gish Jen. Alfred A. Knopf. \$24.00.

attain the proper socioeconomic station in life, Mona's is to attain a more fuzzily-conceived state of self-realization. Thus the classic parent-child conflict develops: child believes parents are rigid, shallow, and intolerant, thinking only of money and getting ahead; parents believe child is spoiled, ungrateful, rebellious, thinking only of . . . well, God knows what that girl is thinking of. All the Changs can say for sure is that Mona is not the pliant and respectful Chinese girl they want her to be.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its prose, which nicely duplicates the eye-rolling sardonicism of a typical smart adolescent who pays attention in school:

[Naomi] is tall, and loose-limbed, almost hipless, and of completely average shelf size. Her facial addenda have a kind of mythic circularity—round glasses, hoop earrings, basketball Afro; if she were an archaeological ruin, you would surmise circles to be of central significance to her culture.

But this same prose can often veer toward the precious, as it does in the following excerpt, when Mona and her best friend Barbara Gugelstein celebrate the arrival of Barbara's period (and the end of their worried speculation that she might be pregnant):

Hooray! She and Mona celebrate with a ritual egg smash. *O ovum, dear ovum*, they intone. *Be thou ever chary!*

"Chary, or wary?" says Barbara. Mona isn't sure. Still they spend their hot line shift composing an ode with the rhyme scheme *chary/scary/marry*. They are finagling a way to work in *hari-kari*, when, lo and behold, guess who calls?

This cuteness becomes especially trying toward the end of the book, when telephones start "ding-ling"-ing instead of just ringing.

But the novel displays a good bit of verbal ingenuity even when it's going over the edge like this, and it captures better than anything else I've read the cultural hodgepodge that now exists in many suburban areas in this country, where all the waiters in the kosher deli are Chinese and the owner of the Italian restaurant hails from Bombay. This may represent another kind of adolescence—one that we're going through as a country, and in which the major question is "What does it mean to be an American?" rather than "What does it mean to be an adult?" Gish Jen provides no profound answers to either of these questions, but she clearly has some great fun posing them.

Another book that plays with the uneasy cultural juxtapositions of life in contemporary America is *Cheaters*, a first collection of stories by Dean Albarelli.⁵ As regular readers of *The Hudson Review* know (three of the

⁵ CHEATERS AND OTHER STORIES, by Dean Albarelli. St. Martin's Press. \$20.95.

stories in the collection originally appeared in these pages), Albarelli is something of a rarity—a Generation X-er who has managed to sidestep his contemporaries' overly ironic view of the world. In other words, he's not afraid to write about things that matter. I've been waiting for this book ever since I read my first Albarelli story back in the 1980s, and now that it has arrived I can happily report that I'm not disappointed.

One of the most heartening aspects of Albarelli's work is the fact that his characters, though almost exclusively white, don't all belong to some bland, undifferentiated category of middle-class Americans. He's grasped the fact that many people in this country are still shaped by their religious and ethnic backgrounds, even when that influence is submerged under several generations of homogenized modern life. His work, therefore, is populated by recognizable Catholics (both the Irish and Italian kind), Jews, and Protestants, all of whom carry the legacy of their heritage with them, without being narrowly defined by it. Maybe that's why these stories, though not always as pointed or dramatic as I'd like, nonetheless leave me with an impression of weight.

A recurring element in the collection is the young male protagonist involved with more than one woman (the "cheaters" of the title, I suppose). In "Passengers," a married ferry captain starts an affair with his orthopedic nurse; a visiting professor in "Infatuated" takes up with one of his students while his longtime partner remains at home; the protagonist of the title story, a private investigator, is hired to tail a client's wife who is having an affair with his own former mistress; there's even a priest in "Flames" who's cheating on God, so to speak, by succumbing to the temptations of an old girlfriend.

The basic predicament of these characters, however, turns out to involve more significant emotions than a simple guilt over their duplicity and uncontrolled libidos. Albarelli finds in their situation a more universal expression of the confused, half-committed, morally-compromised state of being that seems to be a basic condition of life in the amorphous 1990s. And many of the best stories end with a hope of redemption—a hope that ties in with the persistent but unobtrusive presence of religion in Albarelli's fiction. The last story, appropriately titled "Grace," makes this connection explicit. As the story closes, a straying husband (who was sleeping with another woman on the night that his wife Bitsy was brutally raped) finds himself yearning to confess:

I used to pray a lot when I was in Nam, more out of loneliness than being afraid most times, but this was the thing: . . . my prayers would always be spoken to Bitsy. Never to God, not dear Jesus or any of that crap, though I know it's not just crap for some. You can laugh, but it was like Bitsy, she was my God. Like everything was in her hands, or she could sort of oversee it all, anyway. Not everyone has someone like that, but like I said, Bitsy and I have been together since tenth grade, and I think maybe if you've got that kind of person, they can do for you what the nuns used to call Grace. There's just this one person who

can tell you what you've done is okay, or whose forgiveness is the only thing that matters if it wasn't.

But for me the most accomplished piece in the collection is "The Orthodox Brother." This beautifully modulated story opens with Laura Miller, a young unmarried woman who isn't particularly proud or demonstrative of her Jewish heritage, starting a new job and temporarily moving in with her older brother Adam. Having married an Orthodox woman, Adam now presides over a strictly traditional household, right down to the separate dishware for meat and dairy. In fact, the complexity of religious observance in the house is such that Laura finds herself constantly transgressing rules—taking the train and receiving phone calls on the Sabbath, for instance, or admitting in front of Adam's child that she had a BLT for lunch. But the central conflict in "The Orthodox Brother," unlike that in some of the other fiction covered here, doesn't reduce down to an obvious schema, with Adam as the proud, religious Jew and Laura as the practical, self-denying one (Laura, for example, surprises herself at a party by vigorously defending the character of the Jews in an argument with a Holocaust revisionist). Instead, Albarelli treats us to a more sophisticated kind of storytelling—one that is fair to everyone but easy on no one, and that leaves us with a richer, more ambiguous sense of the issues and allegiances involved. Here and elsewhere in this adept collection, he writes with a mature appreciation for emotional subtleties, never tying his fictional world into a straitjacket of simplistic categories and contrasts.

JAMES SEATON

A Critic Whose Judgment Can Be Trusted

INSISTING THAT LITERARY CRITICISM COULD NEVER be a science, Anatole France asserted “the good critic is he who relates the adventures of his own soul among masterpieces.” In an era when “masterpiece” no longer appears even in the titles of anthologies and “soul” is heard more often in music stores than churches, it is unlikely that the kind of critical impressionism France championed will return to favor. As against the transmogrification of literary criticism into cultural studies, France’s program nevertheless has a certain appeal. James Tuttleton thinks criticism ought to be “an explication and celebration of imaginative genius,” a view that avoids France’s subjectivism but shares his sense that criticism is most valuable when it encourages us to recognize and learn from the insights afforded by short stories and novels, not when it confirms our own sense of ideological superiority. *Vital Signs*, Tuttleton’s collection of essays on American literature and criticism, does include some polemical moments, but most of the book is devoted to analyzing and celebrating the greatness of writers like Francis Parkman, Henry James, Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton.¹ The ability to integrate analysis with celebration requires both intellectual energy and generosity of spirit; James Tuttleton is one of those rare critics who possesses both, as *Vital Signs* demonstrates.

Sometimes Tuttleton polemicizes in order to celebrate, as in the opening essay on “Parkman and the Emptiness of Postmodern History.” Disposing easily of Simon Schama’s *Dead Certainties*, with its use of “concocted scenes, interior monologues, and fabricated diary entries” to retell the story of the 1759 British victory over the French at Quebec, Tuttleton turns with “great pleasure . . . to the work of Francis Parkman,” whose *Montcalm and Wolfe* (1884) remains the classic account of the famous battle on the Plains of Abraham. Even if one agrees with Schama that it is an achievement to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, between the historian and the novelist, Tuttleton demonstrates that Schama’s work represents no advance. Parkman was not only “the greatest historian America has ever produced” but also a “superb writer.” Schama, on the other hand, has abdicated his task as a historian

¹ VITAL SIGNS: Essays on American Literature and Criticism, by James W. Tuttleton. Ivan R. Dee, Inc. \$27.50.

without succeeding as a novelist. Tuttleton, however, is not willing to leave the matter there, as a mere literary impressionist might. Though he clearly prefers Parkman's evocations of "vision, energy, will and stoic determination" to Schama's postmodernist delight in chaos, Tuttleton goes further, making a persuasive case for Parkman as a careful historian who acknowledged his own biases and often transcended them. Noting that Parkman warned readers often of his own antipathy to Catholicism and even directed them to Jesuit histories as a corrective, Tuttleton finds in Parkman's "candor and in the invitation to consider alternative viewpoints . . . decisive evidence that not every historian's work must be seen as fatally compromised by a personal perspective."

Because Tuttleton conveys his own delight in great works of history and fiction, his occasional criticisms do not denigrate but instead give added weight to his praise. He can acknowledge Francis Parkman's "continual Jesuit-baiting" and "rhetorical straining for the purple passage" and still pay tribute to the intellectual and literary achievement of his multivolume *France and England in North America*. When Tuttleton disagrees with an author, his objections are not allowed to interfere with his literary judgments. Tuttleton calls attention to the "magisterial vision of human will and fortitude" in Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, even while he questions the main character's determination, apparently endorsed by the author, "to resist and refuse the human rhythms of erotic and familial existence." The chapter on Jack London, aptly titled "Radical Bewilderment," brings out the glaring contradictions in the author's attempt to connect a "Darwinian-Nietzschean" philosophy with "Marxian-socialist" politics, but Tuttleton also reminds us that London wrote "a dozen or so very nearly perfect tales and a handful of impressive novels." In "The Marrying Kind: James's *The American*," Tuttleton makes his own critique of the novel while rejecting current attempts to explain James's literary treatment of marriage by reference to "the author's supposed homosexuality." Tuttleton asks "whether seen through the homoerotic lens, James emerges as a more powerful novelist, a greater artist." Since the answer is no—indeed the use of that "lens" seems to diminish both James and his fictions—Tuttleton turns to other approaches.

Yes, he argues, there is a problem about James's treatment of marriage in *The American*, but it is a literary problem having to do with the confusing mixture of romance and realism in the novel. In his 1907 Preface to *The American*, the elder James confessed that his youthful novel lacked verisimilitude, since in real life the French aristocrats would probably have been more than happy to marry off one of their daughters to an American millionaire. Conceiving of an aristocratic pride so willing to forgo monetary advantage was evidence of his youthful romanticism, a romanticism that in 1907 James argued complemented rather than weakened his commitment to realism. After all, Scott, Balzac and Zola were both romantic and realist at the same time, in the same novels. The argument has an independent interest, but

Tuttleton argues, against James himself, that the true failure of realism in the novel lies “not in the Bellegardes’ eventually rejecting Newman; it is in their initially consenting to entertain his courtship for Claire at all.” Tuttleton objects not because of any statistically provable predilection of French aristocrats for blood over money but rather on the literary grounds that the Bellegarde family throughout the novel itself are portrayed as “exceptionally proud, haughty, arrogant, mechanically polite, but intensely snobbish aristocrats.” Whatever French aristocrats may have done in real life, the Bellegardes of *The American* would not have been willing to accept Christopher Newman, a “lounging, slangy, socially illiterate American manufacturer of washtubs and leather goods,” as a suitor for Claire. Tuttleton’s argument is convincing in itself, and illustrates as well that his long championship of literary realism has not attenuated his awareness of the claims of “fictional consistency.”

Tuttleton is probably best known for *The Novel of Manners in America*, a book that argues against the still-prevailing notion that the most important American fiction is romantic rather than realistic. The essays in *Vital Signs* on William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald build on the chapters devoted to them in the earlier book. Essays on Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Jack London and Ellen Glasgow in *Vital Signs* assess them as writers who likewise share Tuttleton’s own “faith in the representation of observed reality.” In some cases Tuttleton must defend their achievements against critics more interested in ideology than either art or “observed reality.” He objects, for example, to contemporaries who see the ultimate suicide of Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as symbolizing some sort of feminist victory—“those daft academics for whom a woman’s suicide is a noble protest against ordinary reality”—but praises the novel itself for its “remarkable grasp of human psychology.” The chapter on Hemingway, “Emasculating Papa,” takes issue with critics for whom sexual politics are more important than Hemingway’s “purity of style, clarity of image, and vividly rendered dramatic action.” More often, Tuttleton simply ignores critical distortions in the service of one cause or another and focuses instead on pointing us to the insights embodied in the work. In “Propriety and Fine Perception,” Tuttleton carefully leads the reader through Henry James’s *The Europeans*, concluding with an eloquent statement of its vision of “life as an opportunity to be actualized and refined through the artifice of elaborate form, and to be enjoyed for the intricate moral and social arrangements which constitute its beauty.” “Edith Wharton: The Archeological Motive” clarifies the ways novels like *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* reveal Edith Wharton’s awareness of both the “sexual hypocrisy, intellectual narrowness, civic irresponsibility and class snobbery” of old New York and her equally strong sense of “the necessity of the individual’s commitment to the cultural tradition.”

Tuttleton’s interpretations are generally convincing, especially since

throughout he uses biographical details to amplify rather than to reduce the significance of the works themselves. On the other hand, when this perceptive critic attempts to explicate the philosophical foundations of his criticism, the results are less than fully persuasive, even for those who admire the criticism itself. Tuttleton himself refers to his theorizing as “vexed ruminations” and confesses “to inadequacy before this task,” one he ruefully characterizes as “a reluctant expression of the principles implicit in my own practice.” One reason Tuttleton’s resort to theory is less persuasive than one might expect is his dependence on Martin Heidegger for authoritative testimony on the nature of truth. Refuting Simon Schama’s postmodernist rejection of truth as a goal of historical narrative, Tuttleton finds it necessary to cite Heidegger on behalf of “the primordial character of Truth.” In an essay on Jacques Derrida (“Jacques et moi”), Tuttleton again quotes long and not especially illuminating quotations from *Being and Time* before pointing out that the same point was made long before Heidegger by Thomas Aquinas “with total conviction and conclusive simplicity.” Why, then, refer to Heidegger at all—especially since the origins of deconstruction itself can be traced to this same Heidegger? Perhaps using one of the icons of the cultural left against its own arguments is a clever debating ploy, but it is blunted by Tuttleton’s offhand dismissals of Heidegger at the beginning and end of the book; in the “Preface” Heidegger is listed, along with Barthes and Foucault, as one of the sources of “the ‘death of the author’ nonsense,” and in the last essay, “Some Modern Sophists,” Heidegger is dismissed as one of the “pontificating Sophists” whose influence Tuttleton rightly decries.

There is also a surprising disjunction in Tuttleton’s own argument between his critical practice and his theorizing. In his criticism, Tuttleton belongs “to the school of Aristotelian mimesis,” as he says of Stephen Crane. Tuttleton begins “Jacques et moi” by emphasizing his own loyalty to the literary realists, “writers whose aesthetic intention was manifest as a call to represent life as they had seen it.” It is “the convergence . . . of M. Derrida and the theory of American literary realism” that drives Tuttleton to the uncongenial task of theorizing. Since Derrida’s work is a “new attack on the theory of representation itself,” its acceptance carries the implication that “nearly everything that Howells, James, Twain, Garland and others were trying to do, or thought they were doing, will be seen as utterly useless, misguided, and naive.” In taking up the honorable task of defending these writers, however, Tuttleton seems to forget that both Aristotle and the literary realists asserted that literature could tell truths about the world in which we live. Instead, he argues that the truths of literature are valid not for the social world in which we live but for an “alternative world” conjured up by the work itself. In “Jacques et moi,” Tuttleton does not challenge directly the deconstructionist notion that language can never reveal truth about the public world but instead argues only that literature tells truths about alternative worlds, making the problematic assertion that “The world I

might inhabit, the alternative life I might live, is on the deepest level, not less 'real' than the life I do live." His argument is not clarified when he uses Heideggerian terminology to explain the point: "That imagined world also has as its ontological *situs* the domain of the primordial truth. . . ." It is even more difficult to figure out what Tuttleton has in mind when one recalls that in "Jacques et moi" itself he cites the New Critical notion of "the literary work as a self-contained heterocosm" as an earlier example of the sort of attack against "realism as a literary-critical premise" that Derrida is launching and which he is opposing. Far better, one might have supposed, for Tuttleton to defend both the literary realists and his own criticism by asserting that the truth of the insights afforded by Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Kate Chopin is more evident than anything provided by Derrida's philosophy—or Heidegger's either. As Tuttleton notes in a passing but effective refutation of the deconstructionist notion that meanings are undecidable,

The apparent gibberish of Faulkner's idiot Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, the verbal displacements of the analysand's speech (in [Philip] Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*), and the countless variations in phonemes and allophones that we encounter in dialect speech (in Twain and Ellison) can seem quite confusing. But somehow we do make out the meaning, even as the bumblebee flies.

For a straightforward, convincing exposition of Tuttleton's views on the relations between literature, criticism and society, one would do well to turn from the explicitly theoretical essays to "William Dean Howells and the Uses of Criticism." A reader of *Vital Signs* is likely to feel that Howells, not Anatole France, is the true ancestor and model for Tuttleton's own work. No great shakes as a theorist, Howells remains important as a critic because his work testifies to the responsibility with which he made his judgments; Tuttleton quotes Howells' high conception of criticism as "the exercise of discernment between the good and the bad, the false and the true, the sincere and the sham." Cosmopolitan in his literary tastes, sometimes radical in his political opinions, Howells nevertheless insisted that the "realist portrayal of ordinary middle-class family problems" was a worthy subject for great literature. Although best-known as a promoter of realism, "*mimesis* was never an end in itself for Howells." If he could not reconcile the conflicts between beauty, truth and morality, he could at least refuse to dismiss their competing claims merely to achieve theoretical consistency. Howells, Tuttleton asserts, was most of all a critic "whose judgments could be trusted." Most readers of *Vital Signs* are likely to conclude that Tuttleton himself is a critic whose judgments can be trusted when he writes on Francis Parkman, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, and, indeed, on just about any writer he chooses to consider—with the possible exception of Martin Heidegger.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

LOUIS SIMPSON's most recent books are *The King My Father's Wreck* (memoirs), and *There You Are*, a collection of new poems; also *Nombres et poussière*, a translation of his poems into French. . . . JEAN STAROBINSKI has recently been awarded the Goethe Prize (Hamburg, 1994). His latest book is *Largesse* (Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994; to be published in translation by Chicago University Press). . . . RICHARD PEVEAR has translated two other essays by Jean Starobinski, three books of poetry by Yves Bonnefoy, and a number of works by Russian writers. He lives in France. . . . ROBERT McDOWELL's recent books include *The Diviners*, a book-length poem with an introduction by Dana Gioia, *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (with Harvey Gross), and *The Reaper Essays* (with Mark Jarman). . . . JOAN WICKERSHAM's novel *The Paper Anniversary*, which grew from a story first published in *The Hudson Review*, has been reissued in paperback by Washington Square Press. . . . GEORGE WATSON, who is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, is the author of *British Literature since 1945* (St. Martin's). . . . DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN* is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *The Boy in the Well* (1995, Overlook Press/Viking). His plays include *The Midnight Visitor* and the forthcoming *Jefferson and Poe*.

SYDNEY LEA's *To the Bone* (University of Illinois Press), a volume of new and selected verse, was a 1996 National Book Award nominee. . . . ROBERT B. SHAW* teaches at Mount Holyoke College. His most recent poetry collections are *The Wonder of Seeing Double* (Massachusetts) and *The Post Office Murals Restored* (Copper Beech). . . . JOAN MURRAY is author of *The Same Water* (Wesleyan). . . . *The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra*, edited by P.P. Raveendran, has appeared from Bodhi Publications, Calicut, India. . . . TOM WAYMAN was the 1996 Presidential Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. . . . TOM SEXTON* is Alaska's Poet Laureate. His latest book is *A Blossom of Snow* (Mad River Press). . . . BERT CARDULLO is co-translator and editor of *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, published in November 1996 by Routledge. In October 1996 he addressed a Fulbright convocation in Turku, Finland, on the subject of "Woody Allen's Ingmar Bergman Complex." . . . ROBERT PHILLIPS' fifth collection of poems, *Breakdown Lane*, was a finalist for the 1996 Poets' Prize. . . . BRUCE BAWER is the editor of *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*, the paperback edition of which will appear in 1997 from Touchstone. His poems appear in the new anthology *Rebel Angels* (Story Line Press). . . . TESS LEWIS' essays and reviews also appear in *The New Criterion* and *The American Scholar*. . . . CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK teaches at Williams College. Her most recent book is *Rejoining the Common Reader: Essays, 1962-1990*. . . . GARY KRIST's first novel, *Bad Chemistry*, is forthcoming from Random House. . . . JAMES SEATON's most recent book is *Cultural Conservatism, Political Liberalism: From Criticism to Cultural Studies* (University of Michigan Press, 1996).

*Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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When I was a teacher and the subject of war came up, I would write a name on the blackboard: Somme. Who, I would ask, had heard of it? None of the students would answer. Only one or two knew anything at all about the Great War. I would tell them that the Somme was a battle in that war, a terrible battle in which thousands were killed or wounded . . . 60,000 casualties in the British army on the first morning alone. It was Hell on earth, but the men who went through it consoled themselves with a thought: "Generations will remember what we did here. It will never be forgotten." Yet not one of the young people in front of me had ever heard of it.

—Louis Simpson, "Soldier's Heart," p. 541.

In some important works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mills on the rivers are great emblematic characters, sometimes glorious, sometimes suffering. I am thinking of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, of Bacchelli's *Mulini del Po*, of Janáček's opera *Jenůfa*. The mills embody a wealth halfway between landed property and urban capitalism. The vast mills are intermediaries between towns and fields.

—Jean Starobinski, "Water-Wheels: The Factory on the River," p. 553.

Amis was the king of the chatterers. He lived for talk, his books are talk recorded in print—they commonly begin, as *Lucky Jim* did, with a remark in dialogue—and he learned the craft of fiction less by reading, one might suspect, than by talking and listening. You do not have to know much to be a novelist, I remember his saying, since the reader, if you put one technical detail in, will always assume you know the rest of them.

—George Watson, "I Was Kingsley Amis," p. 610.